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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Voice as a Technology of Selfhood:
Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Nina Sun Eidsheim

Committee in charge:

Professor Jann Pasler, Co-Chair
Professor George E. Lewis, Co-Chair
Professor Adriene Jenik
Professor David Pellow
Professor Miller Puckette
Professor John Shepherd

2008

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is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego
2008

*I dedicate this dissertation to the first of many who have
taught me how to live and work with dedication and high spirit: my
ninety-year-old maternal grandmother
Ingrid Nordeide.*

To mi esposo, Luis, I also dedicate this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Curriculum Vita.....	xv
Abstract.....	xviii
Introductory Chapter	
Introduction.....	1
Lessons.....	3
Situating This Work In Scholarship	6
Race and Vocal Timbre	7
The Singing Voice.....	13
Discourse on the Quality of Vocal Timbre.....	18
Perspectives.....	19
Overview of the Chapters	22
Voice Lesson One	28
Part One	
Chapter 1: Constructing Difference: Teaching Vocal Timbre	
Introduction.....	30
Physiological Premise.....	31
Physical Characteristics of the Vocal Folds.....	32
Morphological Differences	32
Voice Training.....	35
The Vocal Body (i).....	36
The Influence of Pedagogy	36
Conversations based on scenes from the vocal studio.....	39
Sonic Perceptual Framework	47

Knowledge about the influence of geographical location on perception	48
The Modern Western Classical Vocal Ideal	49
Post-Garcian Voice: The Application of Science in Vocal Pedagogy	50
Time and Social Power	53
The Pedagogy of Whiteness: Taxonomies of Vocal Timbre	62
The Pedagogy of Whiteness: Constructing the Vocal Body.....	65

Chapter 2: The Construction of “Acousmatic Blackness” in American Opera

Setting the Stage.....	67
Introduction.....	68
“Acousmatic Blackness	69
Early African-American Classical Opera Singers.....	70
Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield	70
Sissiretta Jones	74
Spirituals	76
Ethnosympathy.....	81
“Acousmatic Blackness” in Opera	84
Racialized Casting	89
Seeking All-Black Casting.....	92
Tone of the Voice	97
The Presence of African-American Timbre in American Opera	100
“Authentic” Voice	101
Conclusion	101

Voice Lesson Two

My Mom’s Story	104
----------------------	-----

Chapter 3: Vocaloid: Synthesizing Race

Introduction.....	108
Getting to know Lola, Leon and Miriam	109
Stereotyping in Representation	112
Calculation Race.....	115
Theorizing In the Acoustic Shadow	117

Part Two

Chapter 4: Meaning and Affect Through Vocal Timbre

Introduction.....	124
Signification in language	126
Understanding of Signification in Music When Drawn	
From Theories of Signification in Language	127
How Signification Through Sounds in Music Differs From	
Signification Through Sounds in Language.....	129
Definition of Terms and Concepts	130
Sound as Medium.....	133

The Sonic Saddle and the Articulation of Meaning Through Music	135
Signification in Music.....	140
Primary Signification.....	141
Secondary Signification.....	144
Affect and Meaning Through Vocal Timbre	146
Signification: A Performative Articulation.....	154
Chapter 5: (Vocal) Timbre in a Historical and Perceptual Perspective	
Introduction.....	158
I. A Historical Perspective on the Emergence of the Perception of Overtones and Timbre in Western Classical Music	
The “Discovery” of Overtones and Emerging Consciousness of Timbre	162
Timbre as Measurable Object	167
Performative Listening	170
II. Perceiving Timbre	
The Relationship Between Overtones and Timbre.....	171
Discrepancy between the Sound in the Acoustic World and the Perceived World.....	172
Equilibrium of the Listener and Perceptualization of Sound.....	175
Timbre Manipulation.....	177
Conclusion	179
Chapter 6: Performing Timbre/Shaping the Vocal Body	
Introduction.....	181
Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts from Sociology: Irving Goffman.....	186
Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts from Philosophy: J.L. Austin	192
Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts from Feminist and Queer Studies: Judith Butler	195
Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts: Conclusion.....	196
Performing Vocal Timbre and Identity: Suzanne Cusick.....	167
Performing Racialized Vocal Timbre.....	201
Performing Race: Shaping Vocal Racialized Timbre.....	205
Theorizing the Vocal Body: Questions.....	208
Theorizing the Vocal Body: Perspectives from Jacques Derrida.....	209
The Power of the Solo Performance: Disidentification.....	214

Part Three

Chapter 7: Jimmy Scott: Disidentification and Drag Reception

Introduction.....	218
Scott’s Performative Strategies.....	221
Audience Drag Performance in Reception.....	224
The Source.....	229
Sex and Death.....	231
Performative Listening.....	233
Conclusion.....	235

Chapter 8: Towards a Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Vocal Timbre

Introduction.....	239
The “Logic, Structure and Inner Texture of Life” and its Relation to Vocal Timbre.....	243
Theorizing Affect and Meaning Through Vocal Timbre: Articulation Through Performance.....	253
The Vocal Body (ii).....	264
Timbre Corporeal.....	267
Conclusion.....	270

Work Cited	273
-------------------------	-----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: LEFT: “The Family Group of the Katarrhinen”: Inventing the Family of Man RIGHT: Panoptical Time: Progress Consumed at a Glance. From Anne McClintock 2002: 59	58
Figure 2: From Lilli Lehmann 1921:19	59
Figure 3: From Lilli Lehmann 1921: 43	60
Figure 4: From Lilli Lehmann 1921: 99	61
Figure 5: Leon	119
Figure 6: Lola	120
Figure 7: Miriam	121
Figure 8: Cantor	122
Figure 9: Screenshot of the Vocaloid Interface.....	123
Figure 10: “Semiological Model” from Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 172	137
Figure 11: "Matter in Music" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 156	149
Figure 12: "Syntax and Timbre in Music" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997:164.....	152
Figure 13: "The Medium and the Saddle" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 16.....	155
Figure 14: Cover of <i>The Source</i> , Atlantic Records	225
Figure 15: Cover of <i>Falling in Love is Wonderful</i> , Tangerine Records.....	226

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At the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) I was privileged to work with many people with brilliant minds and generous hearts. I first came to San Diego to work with Professor George Lewis. The ways in which George challenges and triggers my imagination as a musician and a thinker have been essential to the path I have taken: his perceptive qualifying exam prompt (in response to my topic on African-American opera singers) is in fact the genesis of the direction this dissertation has taken. My first year seminar with Professor Jann Pasler was as mind opening as her questions are today. Her inquiry into the ways we might think about history as women and as post-modernists continues to offer crucial lessons. My numerous independent studies with Professor Adriene Jenik (Visual Arts Department) have been a steady source of support, and have been especially helpful in terms of getting my head around some theoretical corners—specifically French poststructuralism, gender and queer theory, and issues regarding human interactions with and through technological media. Professor Miller Puckette provided much guidance in my early project on interfaces for musicians.

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Thanks go to California Cultures in Comparative Perspectives for the Summer Fellowship which allowed me to complete my ethnography of voice teachers in Southern California. And special thanks is due to director David Pellow, who has been very supportive from the first monetary assistance he generously gave to the international festival and conference Powering Up/Powering Down to conversations about my work, and finally to joining my dissertation committee.

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Last summer my husband Luis and I packed up and drove across the country, following the I-40 from California to Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. There we have made a new home, and we have many people to thank for the smooth transition including Interim Director of the Hubbard Center Kathleen Brinko, Dean Bill Harbinson and Associate Vice Chancellor Linda Robinson.

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And, finally, to my husband Luis, who changed my life, and who consistently helps me to keep the big picture in mind.

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- 2009 "Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of the Performativity of Vocal Timbre." *TRANS-Transcultural Music Review* 13. Special issue on Music and Performance Studies. Alejandro Madrid. Ed. (Peer-reviewed, accepted).

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- 2008 *John Cage's "Song Books."* Multimedia, interactive DVD. With Jacqueline Bobak and Paul Berkolds. Produced by the California Institute of the Arts and University of York, UK. Forthcoming.
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“The Sonic Color Line: The Taxonomy of Race and Vocal Timbre in the United States.” National Meeting of the Society of Ethnomusicology, Columbus, OH. October 2007

“Synthesizing Race: An Ethnography of *Vocaloid*.” National meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Honolulu, HI. November 2006.

“Mapping the Space Between Musical Sound and Listener: Understanding Vocal Timbre.” National meeting of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory, Los Angeles, CA. November 2006.

“Constructing Race: Pedagogy and Vocal Timbre.” National meeting of The Society for American Music Conference, Chicago, IL. March 2006

“Your Stages of Change.” *Stages of Change: Theater and Politics*. (Invited speaker). 2-day international seminar. Norwegian Theater Academy, Fredrikstad, Norway. March 2006

“The Development and Implementation of *Mapping the Beat*.” (Invited speaker). The Center for Learning Through the Arts, University of California, Irvine. March 2006.

“The Taxonomy of Vocal Timbre and the Construction of Race.” Music Performance and Racial Imagination Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference, New York University, New York City, NY. February 2005.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Voice as a Technology of Selfhood:
Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance

by

Nina Sun Eidsheim

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2008

Professor Jann Pasler, Co-Chair

Professor George E. Lewis, Co-Chair

In this dissertation I examine the production of race through sound in general and vocal timbre in particular, and investigate how the construction of the black voice—against the backdrop of the normative white—in opera, spirituals, and popular music reflects deeply-held American ideas about race. Which processes have contributed to the racialized perception and reification of timbre? What are some of the social and political processes embedded in the cultural capital possessed by certain vocal timbres in specific cultural contexts and various historical periods?

I trace modern vocal pedagogy to its origin in colonial ideology, and the concept of a classical African-American vocal timbre from Marian Anderson to the spiritual in the abolitionist era. Investigating the vocal synthesis software Vocaloid, I uncover the macro politics of race and gender as they are materialized in the micro politics of sound: dominant race and gender relations are reproduced through electronic music products and tools. My study of the ways in which producers have framed the African-American jazz and ballad singer Jimmy Scott—as, most saliently, a woman, and as symbolizing death—offers insights into how nonconforming African-American masculinities are desired and consumed.

This dissertation ultimately investigates the performative and corporeal aspects of the singing voice, considering these phenomena in terms which involve both performers and audiences. As a consequence, I have shifted the focus of inquiry from the *sound* of singing—which I term *timbre sonic*—to the *physical act* of forming that sound—*timbre corporeal*—and proposed an investigation of the *choreography* of vocal timbre.

Introductory Chapter

Mr. Darden: “The second voice that you heard sounded like the voice of a Black man; is that correct?”

*California v. Orenthal James Simpson*¹

We came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us what we can't have and divert us from the monotony of sameness.

Trinh T. Minh-ha²

Introduction

Vocal timbre is commonly thought of as a given material with which words are formed or pitches are sung. It is assumed, of which the first epigraph is only one example, that the composite sound of a person's voice—the timbre—reveals something essential about the person's body, something that could not but be revealed through the timbre of the voice. In other words, vocal timbre is thought of as something indelible like a fingerprint.³

In this dissertation I examine the assumption that vocal timbre is an unmediated reality of the body and observe how this has played out historically in the cognitive reception of the African-American voice in the United States. Using case studies, I reveal the tie that binds specific vocal timbres and the nature and significance of those meanings thereof. And, using performance theory I take issue with the premise that the body with

¹ *California v. Orenthal James Simpson* (1995) (Quoted in Baugh 2003: 155).

² Quoted in Hisama (1993: 99). Her emphasis.

³ It is, however, interesting to note that despite the credence vocal timbre has as an identifier of a person, a voice cannot be secured under copyright laws. In effect, vocal timbre is not viewed, legally or commercially, as unique.

which we sing is unmediated. I argue that, unlike a fingerprint, vocal timbre is the sound of a habitual performance that has shaped the physical body. In other words, I claim that vocal timbre is not an elementary sound of an essential body, but rather that both timbre and body are shaped by unconscious and conscious training that are cultural artifacts of attitudes towards gender, class, race and sexuality. Therefore, I investigate racialized vocal timbre in order to assess both the creation of vocal timbre and the construction of individualized meaning and personal affectation through vocal timbre. As such, this work examines the modalities implicated and vested through the production of vocal timbre.

Driving all the discussions in this work is the goal of enhancing the understanding of the interlocking relationship between the body, the act of singing and the medium of vocal timbre through mapping the interaction between the discursive and corporeal, thereby distangling the process of the construction of meaning through vocal timbre and distilling its individual elements thereof. The desired course of study is grounded in my conviction that by locating the mechanisms involved in the production, reception, and naming of vocal timbre we will also identify and thereby denaturalize the devices used in the construction and maintenance of race.

“The somatic realization of race,” in the words of Deborah Wong, “is one of the great performative, destructive accomplishments of any society (2000: 87).” One powerful antidote informing this discourse is awareness of technologies of the “somatic realization of race” as a system that re-fashions perceptual tools assisting us in the decolonization of vocal timbre and recovery of the singer’s agency.

Lessons

This work is interdisciplinary through and through. However, interdisciplinarity on these pages refers not only to the academic fields from which I gathered knowledge about the voice but also to the avenues of questioning that have been raised. *Inter* is used in reference to the manner in which I have allowed knowledge of one area to feed over into another, or, perhaps more accurately, the ways material and experience have combined to force me to consider discipline in a larger context.

One situation in which I had to face my own obstinacy to controlling the cross-feeding of knowledge took place at my last independent study meeting with Deborah Wong. At the time of the meeting we had worked together for a quarter, and Deborah had read about half of the dissertation chapters, along with some more poetically written stories I had not yet decided what to do with. Each time I was elaborating one of the theoretical points I had made in the concluding chapter, I drew on examples from my experience as a singer and teacher of voice, examples that had not been included in the chapters themselves. Halfway through the meeting, Deborah looked at me and simply asked: “Where will you fit in these narratives?”

“I don’t think they’ll be in the dissertation,” I said, although I was quick to point out that it would have been impossible for me to arrive at my conclusions without what I’d learned and experimented with through my own practice as a singer and teacher.

“I dropped that idea long time ago, when I was afraid people would think the dissertation was about vocal method and pedagogy,” I explained.

“Well, think about it...” Deborah replied patiently.

During the one and a half hour drive back to San Diego from Riverside and throughout the next two days I did think about it. The word “voice lesson” was at the same time present in my thoughts. A voice lesson is something I myself have taken and given for decades. My own participation in voice lessons (as a teacher) is something so familiar to me that it is, if I was to make a comparison, as fundamental a level to my existence as eating: something I do every day, so routinized to me that I am barely conscious of it as an active process, and certainly not something worthy of secondary consideration in an “important” forum such as this dissertation. Yet, when trying in conversation to explain some of the most important theoretical concepts that have been developed through this work, I always tend to revert to stories from voice lessons.

Deborah’s questions broadened the inquiry of where in the dissertation I can find room for these stories. The context broadened to a consideration of what narratives I deemed worthy of learning from. And subsequently, what narratives do I deem worthy of drawing upon in forming this story? Did I weed out material sufficient and faithful to the goal of creating a proper, worthy, and official lesson?

Until the moment Deborah’s question prompted me to reexamine my own assumption of what belonged or didn’t belong in the dissertation, my own singing and teaching narratives had simply been devoted to filling the role of that hidden voice that dubs the official singer shown on the screen. The functional implication of the plural *voice lessons* then encompasses more than the lessons I teach or the lessons in which I am being instructed. *Voice lessons* came to indicate a means of questioning what lessons I as an individual perceiver had been willing to listen to, and which lessons are collectivized to become part of the “official” story of socio-perceptual development. Therefore when I

integrate different sections of “voice lesson” throughout the body of this dissertation, they are not *inserted* so much as *saved from being omitted*.

In my experience with my own practice as a so-called interdisciplinary scholar or performer, interdisciplinarity is sometimes delayed simply by my fear of not being “scholarly” enough. Through this study, I have learned that I myself had set stark limitations for my own interdisciplinarity. Without being aware of it, I had been conditioned to be taught by semiotics, critical theory, cultural studies, race studies and so on, as opposed to my own experience as a singer. For this study, I deemed improper and chose not to include the discoveries upon which most of my theoretical work rests, discoveries I had made as a voice teacher and singer.

I therefore use the term *voice lessons* to describe the lessons taught us in the moments when we are not ready, when we think we can censor...when we may not be at our best behavior and when we are off guard about our own reactions. Voice lessons are the pictures being taken when we do not know and do not pose. Voice lessons are the lessons taught when we are not consciously monitoring whether or not we are the kind of student that conforms to pre-conceived images. Voice lessons are the lessons that expose us, or in the words of Ruth Behar, they are the spaces in which we are “vulnerable observers (1996).” Vulnerability allows us to be affected by the studies we are exposed to and to be studied ourselves, in a process referred to by Behar as the “rethinking of objectivity (Behar 1996: 28).” The self-conscious presence of the researcher and author’s body is contained within her process.⁴ For Behar, being a vulnerable observer might

⁴ As in Jane Tompkin (1993: 23-40).

mean observations geared to identify the cognitive relationship between scholars and their subjects, revealing the interconnectedness between so-called research and so-called “real lives,” giving rise to further question as to who is the observer and who is the observed. For me, to be a vulnerable observer means full disclosure of all sources and modes of musical action that inform my research in seeking to fully reveal how the process of singing has been instructing and guiding this study. In the interests of fully revealing the “self who observes,” I include the moments in which I, in the role as a teacher who was taught, attempt to in the words of Clifford Geertz, “articulate what takes place when we in fact are at work (Geertz 1995: 44).”

Situating This Work In Scholarship

To some minds, the sources on which I draw might seem too sprawling and my focus—timbre—strangely narrow. But in positioning my study within the root of vocal timbre, I am providing anchor for questions of musical embodiment and social articulation and an inquisitive logic leading outward to multiple lines of inquiry without allowing too much deviation.⁵ Material valuable to the study of vocal timbre and the construction of affect and meaning, and specifically the construction of race through timbre, is not isolated to musical scholarship. This dissertation draws upon a range of sources, critical modalities and musical experiences in an attempt to understand the

⁵ Timbre is a parameter that never ceases to intrigue me as a singer and composer as it has constantly challenged and fed my musical praxis.

intersections between voice, culture and body, and the phenomenon of perception of vocal timbre.

Race and Vocal Timbre

From a diverse cross-section of fields, media and research approaches, work on race and vocal timbre falls into three broad areas: 1) construction of certain voices and bodies; 2) the issues of listeners' perspective influencing individual perception, and 3) the artists' negotiation of categorization and audience perception.

With a journalistic approach, Rosalyn Story's *And So I Sing: African-American Divas in Opera and Concert* (1993) is one of the most thorough works on issues of race and voice in opera to date.⁶ Basing her work on archival research and original interviews with singers and others active within opera and classical music, Story brings up issues of racialized type-casting and poses questions in regards to whether or not ethnicity plays a role in the vocal timbre of African-American opera and classical singers. Story's important study also writes several influential but nearly forgotten singers into the history of American classical music.

⁶ A professional violinist in the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra Story might have known many of these issues from personal experience as a musician. In a professional symphony orchestra it is not uncommon that only one to two members of an 85 to 105 member orchestra are African-American—about one percent. Not only is the symphonic environment unfriendly towards non-white players, but also potentially in the practice of inviting women into their lines. Trombonist Abbie Conant fought well and long for her solo trombone chair in the Munich Philharmonic. See <http://www.osbornconant.org/articles.htm#women> and Tracy McMullen (2006: 61-80).

The approach of the documentary *Aida's Brother and Sister* (2000) by directors Jan Schmidt-Garre and Marieke Schroeder is similar to that of Story's.⁷ However, the format of audio and video allows interplay of multiple layers of sensory communication that inform the narrative. Excerpts from beautiful performances by Reri Grist, Barbara Hendrix, Jessye Norman and others let the viewer and listener herself hold that information up against any narrative lines. In one extraordinary interview, tenor George Shirley accuses Berlin Opera director Götz Friedrich of taking advantage on stage of racial tensions from the real world. Does Götz project his own racial fears or desires into the drama when he casts Reri Grist in the pageboy role in the *Der Rosenkavalier*, by casting a black person in the role of a villain?

The main discussion within the opera world regarding race and voice takes place in the terms of the question of racialized type casting. This issue is discussed by both the team of Story and Schmidt-Garre and Schroeder. Also African-American tenor Jason Oby takes these issues on fully in a series of interviews and a survey of African-American male opera singers. His findings reveal how African-American male opera singers experience racial type casting, indicating that works such as *Porgy and Bess* are mixed blessings (Oby 1989).

These works illuminate the fact that the issue regarding race and casting plays out differently for male and female performers. African-American male opera singers face issues regarding their role's relation to the female roles in the same opera, and the "character type" of their *fach*.

⁷ Story is interviewed in the documentary and her book is credited for being one of the main sources.

Other considerations to the question of racialized voices in opera include the requirement of all-black casting in certain operas. Jason Oby and Lisa Barg (2000) discuss the ambiguous standing of all-black performer works such as *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) by which the control and positioning of black bodies and voices is at stake. What bodies and voices should sing particular repertoires and roles? What bodies and voices are being chosen to represent certain characters?

Both movies and film studies raise the question of what bodies are being paired with what vocal sounds. Jeff Smith's "Black Faces, White Voices: The Politics of Dubbing in *Carmen Jones*" (2003: 29-42) suggests that the arias of Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte, as respectively Carmen and Joe, were dubbed by white opera singers (Marilyn Horne and Levern Hutcherson), while Pearl Bailey in her role as Frankie was not. Smith suggests that Dandridge and Belafonte's music numbers were close to Bizet's original score while Bailey's number, "Beat that Rhythm," added by Oscar Hammerstein, exhibited clichéd notions regarding African-Americans and rhythm. In *Illusions* (1983), a short film that deals with the issue of racial passings, writer and director Julia Dash shows this dilemma in the reverse situation.⁸ The movie is set in 1942 Hollywood and tells the story of a movie executive who passes as white. In a pivotal moment a glance is exchanged between the main character—the movie executive named Mignon Dupree—

⁸ Although her work does not necessarily focus on vocal passing, Anna Deavere Smith's (1997) staged solo work (which also is adapted for television), illustrates that that one body may perform multiple corporeal-vocal identities. In the research process, Smith spends time in a location such as a neighborhood to interview various community members. Her plays are directly based on quotations from these interviews. Smith embodies each of the figures included in the play and moves fluidly between embodying the many and often strikingly contrasting characters.

and a young African-American singer hired to dub a vocal number already played by the white actress: the look of recognition between the two as one walks out the front door and the other the back door subtly calls attention to questions of vocal timbre as a marker of racial identity that supports social coherence.

Observing vocality in film lets us examine how visual perception of a character formulates, shapes or affects the way we hear their voices. Beyond the narrative and situational elements staged for film, everyday measures such as age, gender, and nationality or geographic locality determine our perception of the voice. A number of studies from social linguistics confirm this phenomenon. Nancy Niedzielski's experiment (1999: 62-85) concluded that listeners tend to hear a dialectal stereotype suggested. Forty-one Detroit residents were asked to choose from a set of different synthesized vowels the token they felt best matched the vowel presented to them on a recording. All the recordings were of a fellow Detroiters, but half of the subjects were told that the speaker was from Canada, while the other half that the speaker was from Detroit. The subjects that were told the speaker was from Canada chose the raised-diphthong token while the subjects that were told the speaker was from Detroit chose the unraised-diphthong token. The only difference between the two groups of respondents was the perceived nationality of the speaker. The "listener," Niedzielski concludes, "uses social information in speech perception (1999: 62)." Niedzielski's experiment suggests that people are informed more by what they *believe* they hear than what they actually hear.

Studies from the fields of acoustic phonetics, sociolinguistics, and social psychology suggest that listeners use a number of factors when they perceive and interpret a speaker's dialect. Visual information such as lip movement also affects how

the listener perceives the spoken segment (McGurk and MacDonald 1976: 746-748); in addition, studies in the field of sociolinguistics and social psychology suggest that stereotypes about the social group of which a speaker is believed to be a member influence how the speaker's speech is perceived (e.g. Beebe 1981; Thakarar and Giles 1981; Williams 1976). Niedzielski suggests that perception is "much more than mere phonetic processing of the speech signal and that other information is used by listeners to process speech signals (1999: 62-63)." Linguist John Edwards has written, "We do not react to the world on the basis of sensory input alone but, rather, in terms of what we perceive that input to mean (1999: 102)." Edwards continues that this is the basis of our personal relationships with individuals and groups and that it reflects our "accumulated social knowledge (102)." Perception is the filter through which sensory data is sorted out. Our particular filter, or perception, is culturally specific and situationally dependent.

The extent to which voice functions as a primary marker of social identity (as the first epigraph illustrates) is revealed in the work of social justice advocates analyzing discriminatory housing practices in which applicants are rejected based on their vocal timbre and accent alone. In studying speech, factors such as word choice and other syntactical issues play a greater indicatory role than in singing where the vocalist usually interprets a fixed text such as the opera libretto. Despite such differences, studies from social linguistics are useful for understanding the perceptual frameworks listeners bring with them to the act of listening.

Examining listening practices—finding that such practices and what is heard are not stable but rather change over time—reveal the non-fixity of sound and their seemingly inherent meanings. Historical studies that deal with blackness and vocal

timbre, such as Ronald Radano's *Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (2003), John Cruz's *Culture on the Margins: Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation* (1999), and Laurie Stras' *White Face, Black Voices: Race, Gender and Region in the Music of the Boswell Sisters* (2007: 207-256) have been particularly helpful in broaching the gap between spoken and musical syntax and the perception of race. Radano questions the grounds on which certain music is identified as "black music." Through textual analysis, he maintains that "black music" cannot be easily separated from "white music." Radano argues that "black music" instead should be understood "as a form constituted within and against racial discourse (4)." Cruz's work is concerned with the songs of slaves, but more specifically, how the *voices* of slaves and newly freed people were heard. He argues that the ability to hear these sounds as *vocal* sounds—"songs of sorrow" rather than "alien noise"—was a pivotal moment in the recognition that slaves were human beings, or conversely, that the recognition that slaves were human beings enabled people to hear (Cruz 1999: 3 quoting Frederick Douglass). As Cruz examines cultural tropes in listening, Stras investigates the notion of "sounding black" as a cultural trope, something that for the New Orleans hot jazz vocal trio the Boswell sisters and their contemporary 1930s audiences was filtered through older minstrelsy traditions and new entertainment media. Stras examines what it meant for the white Boswell sisters to sound black, and how gender and their Southerness "colored" their music and audience perceptions of their performances.

The Singing Voice

Scholarship concerned with the singing voice, with the voice as a medium in-and-of-itself, rather than only the carrier of external information (melody and words), seems to fall into the following categories: vocal pedagogy, medical science, acoustics, gender studies, musicology, ethnomusicology, and philosophy.⁹

The focus of Western vocal pedagogical texts¹⁰ is to question how to produce a desired sound, develop range, speed and agility,¹¹ and grow as an interpreter while maintaining vocal health. Tenor and voice teacher Richard Miller's many pedagogical texts are much used. While Miller's approach might differ from other teachers in its language and the particulars of certain technical issues—for example, how to pass through the *passagio*—they tend to share the assumption that classical vocal technique is the normative technique and that other ways of using the voice are damaging and a kind of deviation from universal standards of healthy and beautiful voices.

My goal has been to develop a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and functions of the voice in order to map out the process of *racialization of vocal timbre*. To this end, medical texts on voice and the opportunity to interview Hans von Leden, the leading laryngologist for singers in California and beyond and the foremost medical researcher on voice, has been crucial. This interview, alongside pedagogical texts and voice researcher Johan Sundberg's *The Science of the Singing Voice* (1989) and in light

⁹ I do not address psychoanalytical studies in this dissertation; however, some of the most imaginative work on voice and subjectivity (Lacan, Zizek, and Dolar) is to be found in this field. The focus of this dissertation is the mapping of the vocal apparatus, vocal timbre and the construction of meaning and affect through vocal timbre. It is my belief that my finding will also be useful for the field of psychoanalysis. Placing my work in relation to the work of Lacan and Dolar is one of my next projects.

¹⁰ I have not reviewed vocal pedagogical texts from vocal styles outside of Western classical and popular music.

¹¹ The word agile is used by singers to describe the level of evenness and flexibility of the voice.

of similar assumptions within the vocal pedagogical texts, has proven invaluable as a resource for my understanding of the vocal apparatus function and mechanism.

Contemporary studies on acoustics and the voice (for example, Childers and Hicks 1990, Clark and Yallo 1995, and Laver 1990) provided a quantifiable perspective for voice and timbre, providing valuable background for dealing with historical accounts of timbre and interpretation of audience perception of timbre.¹²

Questions of gender, sexuality and voice have (to my mind) spurred some of the most productive areas for exploring vocality, body, and their intersections with culture. In these areas, some of the questions asked might seem to be “given:” What is voice? How do we experience voice? How does voice “work” on us? What is the relationship between voice, body, and desire? Suzanne Cusick engages some of these questions in “On Musical Performance of Gender and Sex” (1999). In this essay, Cusick treats questions of how culture is written into the body, or how we can refuse culture’s hand on our bodies and voices: it foregrounds the negotiation of corporeality as foundational to the art and skill of singing. John Shepherd also addresses issues of voice, body and sexuality in “Music and Male Hegemony” (1989). Although less productive in its specific thesis and argument, it does open up for consideration valuable ways of considering the voice: we as listeners do not only consider and interact with pitch as pitch, but also as a vibration in the body.

The historical phenomena of the castrato—perhaps because of its violent, evocative, and elusive nature—has brought forward productive discussions on voice,

¹² Studies such as Milton Metfessel’s (1928) represent a heroic attempt of quantifying the voice of the African-American. While working out detailed parameters of the “Negro” voice, the assumptions upon which the entire study rests, that this voice is quantifiably different from the white voice, does not allow this work to be objective.

sexuality, identity and body. Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (1993) is equally imaginative in the move from the singer as an object of study to the audience and fans of singers and their fantastic relationship to singers as the object of study.¹³ For this dissertation, Koestenbaum's work on the intense relationship the audience can develop with and from the singer's voice has been influential. Elizabeth Wood's essay "Sapponics" (1994: 27-66) serves a similar function in developing the position for including the audience in the analysis of vocal timbre.

Telia U. Anderson (2001: 114-131) turns the production to the performer. In her piece "'Calling on the Spirit:' The Performativity of Black Women's Faith in the Baptist Church Spiritual Traditions and Its Radical Possibility for Resistance," she theorizes the vocal space of glossolalia to be a sanctioned performative moment and tool for women, traditionally repressed in Baptist services. Through this vocal and spiritual practice they, through this particular vocality and, Anderson argues, an Africanist performance strategy (115), take charge of the sermon and reverse gender hierarchies.

Plato's writing on the hiccup (1997: 185c-e) was instrumental to my thinking through of the issues of the outer boundaries of the voice. Is it, for instance, the same voice when the vocal apparatus is used to execute a hiccup as a note sung *sotto voce*? What is the relationship between the pre-linguistic (infant's babble) and the post-linguistic voice (laughter, crying, singing)? Mladen Dolar, in thinking through Plato's dilemma of the hiccup, voices in very clear terms the position the singing voice and vocal timbre (versus voice when delivered words) as given in these words: "Singing represents

¹³ See also Poizat (1992).

a different stage: it brings the voice energetically to the forefront on purpose, at the expense of meaning (30),” that is, at the expense of meaning-delivery as the conventionality that the voice is asked to serve. And this other place, the sound of the voice itself as opposed to the words it has the capacity to carry, is the focus of my investigation. Jacques Derrida’s concept of phonocentrism, a favoring of the spoken over the written word because the voice is the “unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously from within itself... (1976: 20; 1967a: 33),” hints at the magnitude of the voice’s role as a conductor of meaning in our daily lives. It is this puzzle I am pursuing from a more corpo-mechanical angle.

Roland Barthes’s seminal essay *The Grain of the Voice* (1977) is one of the most quoted in scholarship on the voice. With debt to Julia Kristeva, Barthes outlines two types of song: 1) *Pheno-song*, composers’ musical language, rules of genre, style of interpretation--that is, all the formal educated ways of delivering a song, and 2) *Geno-song*, the singer’s work with text that has nothing to do with interpretation, but rather is in the “*diction* of the language (183).” It is here the grain of the voice is to be found. Writes Barthes, “The ‘grain’ of the voice is not—or is not merely—its timbre (185),” but that the *grain* is the “dual production—of language and music (181).” The ‘grain’ is the friction between the body and the language in the act of singing. This essay is quite problematic in many aspects but we are hugely indebted to this work for putting the tactility of voice—of timbre— on the agenda.

Steven Feld's ethnography of the recording studio,¹⁴ a place where people are forced to develop tools to communicate about timbre, brings a careful study of the different strategies of *naming* vocal timbre in order to effectively communicate timbral nuances to the conversation.¹⁵ Documenting five common discursive strategies (Spoken/sung 'vocables,' Lexical onomatopoeic metaphors, 'Pure' metaphor, Association, and Evaluation), Feld offers a model towards understanding how people exchange ideas about sound quality (2003: 321-346). Spoken/sung *vocables* are iconic vocalizations of the timbral feature. For example /dz:::/ to minimize the sound of the beads under the snare drum. Lexical onomatopoeic metaphors are "lexical items that bear a phonological resemblance to the sound they are describing based on acoustic properties," like *hiss* or *click*. 'Pure' metaphor describes when the timbral feature is not invoked, but the word invokes other sensorial domains like *wet*, or *bright*. In Feld's terms, Association involves citing other musicians, time periods, technology etc. Whereas Evaluation is a strategy of merit assessment, as opposed to sound description. While Feld's investigation is principally grounded in exploring relations between music and language, his strategies may offer modal suggestions for my own study in terms of cataloguing and categorizing the words used to describe vocal timbre.

¹⁴ Serge Lacasse (2000) writes about the phonographic staging of the voice in popular music. That staging, among others, is in terms of effects such as for example reverb added in the recording studio.

¹⁵ John D. Puterbaugh (1999: 29-31) also discusses "verbal attributes:" the study of the perceptual dimension of timbre using verbal, connotative attributes. The most prominent researchers in this field are Berger (1963) and G. von Bismark (1976), L. Wedin and G. Gouder (1972) and William M. Hartman (1997), Samuel Pellman (1994), and Juan Roederer (1972).

Discourse on the Quality of Vocal Timbre

Carolyn Abbate (1991) is concerned with the act of singing, operatic voice as “a realm beyond narrative plot, in which women exist as a sonority and sheer physical volume (254).” The integration and employment of these elements gives the female composer the power to “speak” a different text than the one written by her male counterpart. Given that operatic performance thus offers a polyphony of meanings, the listener is always (inter)active, then it may be inferred that the female listener is systematically making cognitive choices about which textual layers chooses to perceive aurally on an ongoing basis.

In her ethnography of Finnish Karelian women refugees singing *itkuvirsi* (laments), ethnomusicologist Elizabeth Tolbert (1994) found that the deepest enunciated “text” of the vocal line was found in the vocal quality of the female voice. Tolbert writes, “It is the very quality of the female crying voice, a voice that ‘cries with words,’ that is elaborated in performance to symbolize affect and to set this genre apart from others to accomplish cultural work grounded in the experience of grief (1994: 180).”

Anthropologist David Samuel identifies another site of resistance through vocal performativity music, mapping Apache Indians’ avoidance of diphthongizing when singing country repertoire. Samuel theorizes that this is a tool that aids them in marking their difference from “White trash, ” and that in “their refusal to twang, people in San Carlos insist that their love of country music grows out of an Apache, not a ‘white trash’ history of exploitation and marginalization (Feld 2003: 339).” Each vowel has a very specific timbre, so the decision to not twang, thus singing a particular set of vowels while avoiding others, determines the timbre. “Different vowels are like different instruments,”

Linguist Peter Ladefoged puts it (2000: 118). Thus, Apache Indians' consequential vowel use is an example of, as Ronald Randano has pointed out, the formation of certain music shaped through a process of "interracial expressions of race (2001: xiii)"— in this case, the refusal of being mixed up or associated with "White trash."

Perspectives

This dissertation is conceived from diverse modes of inquiries, drawing upon four different kinds of sources: 1) Primary sources in the form of my own interviews with voice teachers and students and as a long time participant-observer in vocal communities; interviews with the producers of the synthesis software Vocaloid; 2) published interviews and reviews; 3) my own practice as a singer and teacher; 4) and secondary sources such as public media sources (i.e. newspapers, documentaries, movies etc.), historical, critical and theoretical work.

I have had the privilege of being part of various classical vocal communities¹⁶ as a singer since 1991 and also as a teacher since 1996. My first experience as a classical singer was in Norway and Denmark in a music high school and in two national music conservatory.¹⁷ When I relocated to Southern California in 1999, I began to expand my musical studies beyond performance in the classical "bel canto" tradition but remained a participant-observer within various classical as well as jazz and experimental singing

¹⁶ Before I started my formal vocal training, I had sung in a local gospel choir for two years and conducted that same choir for one year. I'd also formed a voice/piano jazz duo that worked out arrangements for jazz standards.

¹⁷ In terms of questions of race, there were no marked differences between Norway and Denmark.

communities through 2007. Many crucial observations came out of a series of interviews with voice teachers and students I conducted during 2005-2006.¹⁸

I was fortunate to be in e-mail contact with Director Dom Keefe and chief programmer of the vocal synthesis software Vocaloid, Anders Sodergren, and to interview Sodergren in person in late summer 2006.¹⁹

Studying the perception of the African-American voice in opera, I drew upon public discourse as well as historical and contemporary analysis. Biographical works on the careers of Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield, Sissiretta Jones, and Marian Anderson were also invaluable sources. Because the stories of some of the less known African-American classical singers are seldom recorded, Rosalyn Story's (1993) one of a kind work on African-American divas has been particularly helpful. Jon Cruz's 1999 historical sociological perspective on the role of the spiritual in the rise of a new mode of cultural interpretation has been crucial in developing an understanding of the particular nature of the construction of a so-called African-American vocal timbre. Ronald Radano's (2003) monumental study of the interactions between the so-called *black* and *white music cultures* not only led me to other valuable sources, but also confirmed for me the notion that, while a particular timbre or performance style may seem to be the product of a body of difference or an isolated music-making, vocalism in fact takes form *in relation* to multiple streams of multiple traditions and cultures. Mendi Obadike's 2005 work on "stereotyped blackness in the field of sound" was crucial in theorizing, in the words of

¹⁸ This study was made possible with a California Cultures in Comparative Perspectives Summer Fellowship.

¹⁹ This study was made possible with the Ethnic Studies/Latino(a) Studies Summer Fellowship.

Obadike, “acousmatic blackness,” the presence of sonic blackness or African-American vocal timbre in classical vocalities.

Through the presentation of the three case studies opening this dissertation, the mistaken belief that racialized vocal timbre is a result of phenotype and sensibilities essential to a racial group was revealed. In order to expose the “injuries of race,” to use the words of Deborah Wong, I set out to understand how meaning is infused into sound (specifically timbre) of music and how these meanings are performed by both performers, music management and audiences. Cornelia Fales’ (1995, 2002, 2005) exceptional rare work on timbre and perception of timbre provided a framework for understanding how timbre is historically and socially contingent. And John Puterbaugh’s (1999) dissertation on timbre provided much needed lessons on the mechanics of timbre. The works of John Shepherd and Peter Wicke (1997), Richard Middleton (1990), and Tia DeNora (2000, 2003) were crucial in developing an understanding of the relationship between the material reality offered up by sound and the meaning and affect invested in that sound thereof. To understand the performativity of timbre, the works of Irving Goffman (1959), J.L. Austin (1962), Judith Butler (1990), Suzanne Cusick (1999), Jacques Derrida (1976), and Jose Muños (1999) were all crucial.

In formulating a framework for approaching vocal timbre especially the work of Muños and Stuart Hall (1985) and their theoretical concepts of disidentification and articulation were critical.

Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation is organized in three parts. Part One (chapters 1-3) consists of two case studies and one prologue that pose questions regarding the relationship between race and vocal timbre. Part Two (Chapters 4-6) provides a theoretical, historical and critical background and foundation from which to start answering the questions posed in Part One. In Part Three (Chapters 7-8), I offer an analysis considering the performativity of vocal timbre developed in Part Two. By suggesting that the performativity of vocal timbre ultimately is determined by the listener, this chapter points out that a deeper analysis of vocal timbre must include the listener. As such it provides a bridge to the concluding chapter in which I develop the notions of *timbre sonic* and *timbre corporeal*. I suggest that present day work on timbre is *timbre sonic* and *timbre corporeal*, and that the sense of how timbre is corporeally produced as an essential sound of an essential body must be developed.

In the first chapter I investigate teachers' perceptions of the students' race and/or ethnicity and the subsequent vocal timbre expected from their students. My research suggests that teachers expect students' vocal timbres to correlate with what they imagine to be the vocal timbre typical of that race/ethnicity. And these imaginings are often grounded in a mind-set developed in colonial times. There are grounds to speculate that some teachers' expectations or a racialized sound influence firstly what they hear and secondly how they shape students' voices. Therefore, a particular vocal timbre that may seem to confirm categories of racialized vocal timbre might in fact be the imprint of teacher and classical vocal community beliefs in difference as manifested through sound.

Difference as manifested through sound and colonial perspectives of difference being caused by innate racial disparities are indeed both an integral part of modern classical vocal pedagogy. I trace modern classical vocal pedagogy to Manuel Garcia II, the first singing teacher to draw on scientific data (1840), ([1847] 1972), drawing connections between Garcia's training with François-Joseph Fétis (notable most saliently for his fundamental theory of the differences between human races, and the presumption of proportionately divergent music comprehension capacities across race thereof), the data Garcia collected in military hospitals in colonial Algeria (Potter 1998: 55), and the ways in which classically trained voices are perceived and shaped in racialized terms. As participant-observer and through a series of interviews collecting in-depth data on the activities of singing and listening to the voice, I surmised that voice teachers in Southern California exhibited a connection between timbre and race or ethnicity that may be traced back to the colonial heritage of modern vocal pedagogy.

Chapter Two looks at not only the innate dimension of colonial attitudes in vocal pedagogy, but the particular geographical, historical, and cultural dimensions of the presence of a so-called African-American vocal timbre. I examine the necessity for early African-American classical performers to integrate minstrel, spiritual and classical repertoire in their programs. I examine the relation between Italian opera burlesque sequences as they were presented in minstrel shows and often performed by African-Americans and later audiences association between African-American's singing opera and minstrelsy. I trace the origins of the so-called African-American vocal timbre to Marian Anderson. The first African-American singer to receive national and international recognition and influence, she was trained by one of Garcia's disciples.

And lastly, I look at the use of black bodies and voices by white composers, such as Virgil Thomson, in American opera.

Acousmatic blackness, to use Obadike's phrase, refers to the existence of the black body through sonic nuances designated as *African-American vocal timbre*. I argue that acousmatic blackness is devised to evidence physiological differences between races—differences that do not exist in the material, measurable world. However, African-American vocal timbre and acousmatic blackness do exist due to the belief in racial difference and due to collectivized subjective perceptions of difference through sound.

Chapter Three is a prologue to Chapters One and Two, examining the nature of pre-existing beliefs in race as sonic difference. Not only are young singers acculturated by the instructional process to perform racialized timbre, but timbral and vocal differences along categories of race are actualized through music technology. The vocal synthesis software Vocaloid created vocal fonts—"singers" whose profiles were defined alongside assumed racial categories. The packaging of Lola and Leon—Vocaloid's "generic soul singers"—is reminiscent of blackface imagery. The project traces connections between racialized bodies, musical genres and vocal sound.

Chapter Four, the first chapter of Part Two, provides a theoretical foundation from which to start addressing the first of multiple questions posed by the case studies in Part One. How are sounds in music infused with meaning? Drawing on works of Shepherd and Wicke and Richard Middleton, I provide a framework from which to conceptualize: 1) how signification in sounds of language and sound of music differ; 2) how sound in music is a medium through which meaning is articulated; and 3) how affect and meaning is constructed through vocal timbre. I provide a distinction between meaning and affect

through vocal timbre versus sounds of music created by musical instruments. I intend to demonstrate that sounds of musical instruments are in fact understood through that initial corporeal experience of the sound of the singing voice. I claim that both the body of the performer and the body of the listener are imperative to any experience of sound and propose that signification through the sound in music is an interactive performative articulation of both the singer and audience.

After having established that audiences are elemental in articulating meaning through sound in music, in Chapter 5 I turn to the means by which overtones and timbre have been conceived differently since the Enlightenment period. By examining timbre from a historical and scientific perspective, I conclude that meaning of timbre is historically and socially contingent. As a consequence, the part of the timbre on which we choose to focus in our listening is affected, as well as the values. Affect and meaning invested in timbre at any given time are historically contingent. I argue that any investigation of timbre, including this dissertation, is historically contingent. This claim reveals the importance of considering the context that determines which aspects of sound in music are perceived aurally and how the historical and social contingencies implicated in meaning and value are constructed from that sound thereof. As such, this chapter sets up the necessary foundation for theorizing how timbre impacts identity formation.

With the perspectives suggested by Chapters 4 and 5 in mind, in Chapter 6 I investigate timbre not as static but a *dynamic articulation*. Through this perspective I aim to discern how racial identity is articulated through vocal timbre as aspects of performance. I turn to performance studies and affirm that racialized vocal timbre is indeed performed. I introduce the term *vocal body* and suggest that through repeated

performances, the vocal body—the muscles, ligaments, and membranes—are shaped according to the racialized timbral performance. The performance is ultimately executed in the vocal body as the vocal body itself becomes a manifestation of race. Such theoretical framework needs to be placed in perspective in order to conceptualize how and when meaning and affect are read into vocal timbre, as subjective individual identities such as race are constructed through performance both on the part of the listener and the singer. Hence, in Part Two I problematize the notion forwarded by the actors in the case studies presented in Part One, namely the injuries that result from instances when the meaning of timbre is erroneously assumed to be fixed or reconciled.

With Chapter 7 opening Part Three of this dissertation, I examine the career of African-American jazz and ballad singer Jimmy Scott. I address theoretical considerations of the corporeal consequence of the performance of race through timbre, and raise questions regarding performative agency. Specifically I investigate the relationship between the discursive and the corporeal and the role of the audience in this dynamic.

Scott was born with the hormonal illness Kallman's syndrome and therefore never entered puberty. Audiences' expectations in regards to a black male singer are challenged and acted out in unexpected ways. Examining the ways in which Scott has been presented and perceived—as a female and symbolizing death—I propose that in fact audiences in their minds by imagining him in such forms perform drag performances for Scott, a kind of drag reception.

In Chapter 8 I investigate vocal timbre as a cultural artifact. I coin the term *performative articulation* to address the cognitive processes by which audiences connect

specific vocal sounds with particular ideas such as race and gender; these categories are consequently reified. Thus, reification of notions of race through the performance of vocal timbre is circular: audiences join sounds with concepts; (live or digital) performers respond to these sound/concept compounds, and in turn confirm the listeners' linkages. This dissertation suggests that under a paradigm in which vocal timbre is considered as merely a sonic component, racialized timbre remains naturalized. I therefore propose an analysis of the performativity of timbre—performance as 'material creation of timbre' and 'reception as performance'—in order to begin to map and denaturalize the connection between vocal timbre and race.

Thus, I conclude Chapter 8 and this dissertation by proposing that any responsible and truly comprehensive analysis of the voice must consider the voice itself—that organ that creates the sound. If timbre is performed, that microscopic performance must be mapped. I therefore propose to move the focus from the sonic to the corporeal, and urge an analysis of the voice that considers the movements of the vocal organ that births sound.

Voice lesson One

Flashback to: the beginning of the new millennium. Southern California.

At the end of the fifteen minute warm-up preceding a voice lesson:

“You have such a lovely timbre,” a voice teacher tells me.

“Thank you,” I reply, feeling very happy about the compliment.

“The timbre is really quite characteristically Korean. That full sound,” the teacher continues.

“Oh...?”

“Yes, yes. Your Korean cheek bones give you that timbre,” the teacher explains.

I was confused. In Norway, where I grew up and received my foundational training as a singer, I had participated in master classes offered by well-known American voice teachers. They had been puzzled by this Asian-looking girl who spoke Norwegian and who, to their surprise, possessed a signature Nordic²⁰ classical timbre.²¹ Now, only a few months later, I was being complimented for my Korean timbre.

How could the same vocal timbre be interpreted so differently? The master class was held in the town of Bergen on the west coast of Norway, a nation where five thousand Korean children had been adopted by Norwegian families and had grown up in

²⁰ “Nordic” refers to the national vocal school comprised by the Nordic countries. The phenomenon of national schools of singing is elaborated later in this chapter.

²¹ The term *classical timbre* in this chapter (and in the entire dissertation) refers to timbre in European classical vocal style (opera and art music) and repertoire.

typically monocultural Norwegian homes. But I was now in southern California, an area where the Korean population numbered over one million and the Asian population over ten million.²²

In California not only was my classical vocal timbre read as Korean, *I* was, for the first time in my life, perceived as Asian. This notion might present an imaginative challenge for readers in Southern California: it might be difficult to believe and to truly understand. It might be impossible for those readers to imagine the circumstances under which I came to vocal practice.

I grew up in a small village on the west coast of Norway. The population was so homogeneous and the villagers had been so underexposed to people from other continents that some of them, because of my black hair, believed I originated from Africa. In my experience, when a Norwegian family with a little girl who looks different moves to a village where the population has had little or no exposure to people from the outside, but there are no new customs, foods, beliefs or threats to Norwegian identity associated with this child, her neighbors and fellow villagers soon forget that she is from somewhere else. In this cultural context, she is fully Norwegian.

Several years earlier I had visited Seoul. There people did not attempt to talk to me in their language: somehow they knew I was not Korean. My first experience of being read as Korean took place in California.

²² As a comparison, Norway's entire population is 4.5 million people.

Part One

Chapter 1

Constructing Difference: Teaching Vocal Timbre

Facts don't exist. The sole truth lies in a tone
of voice

Ned Rorem²³

Introduction

This chapter will demonstrate that vocal timbre, an attribute that has traditionally been viewed as an unmediated manifestation of the body, is indeed mediated. Through an ethnography of classical vocal pedagogues I investigate the notion of so-called “ethnic” vocal timbre. I argue that because of ingrained notions of corporeal differences along racial and ethnic lines, voice teachers expect to hear these differences in students’ voices, and consequently *construct difference* through vocal training. Tracing modern vocal pedagogy’s incorporation of science-based data regarding the body, I further argue that assumptions regarding the influence of corporeal-structural differences on timbre, based in scientific notions originating in the nineteenth century, are still present in contemporary vocal pedagogy. As a result of formal training and of singers’ willing adjustment to culturally based timbral expectations, racialized timbral categories are not only imagined, but also materialized. As a consequence, vocal timbre as a manifestation

²³ Quoted in Wood (1994: 40).

of race is naturalized. A systematic unveiling of the process whereby vocal timbre is racialized is a necessary first step toward denaturalization.

Physiological Premise

Before we can proceed, we must develop an understanding that voices have timbral capacities greater than the variations we attribute to race. And knowledge regarding the vocal apparatus, vocal technique, and the consequent ranges of vocal timbres must be established. Three main factors are significant for personal vocal timbre:

1. Physical characteristics of the vocal folds (length, thickness, and viscosity)
2. *Morphological differences*: differences between individuals' pharynges and mouth cavities
3. Voice training

Although vocal production depends on the entire body, the structures that are specifically mobilized when we use our voices consist of three different parts which together constitute the voice organ: 1) the activators (the breathing apparatus that consists mainly of the lungs and diaphragm); 2) the vibrators (the vocal folds); 3) the resonators (the vocal and nasal tracts).

Physical Characteristics of the Vocal Folds

The vocal folds are muscles covered with mucous membranes.²⁴ There is a significant correlation between the length of the vocal folds²⁵ and the pitch range of the voice: longer the vocal folds correspond with the possibility for a deeper pitch. However, the same study showed that there is no direct correlation between the length of the vocal folds and the length (height) of their owner's body. Together, the pharynx and the mouth constitute the vocal tract. Air enclosed within the vocal tract acts as resonating material. Any particular resonator will allow certain sounds to pass easily through it, increasing the amplitude of these frequencies while dampening others.²⁶ The size and shape of the lungs, however, have no direct influence on the timbre of the voice.²⁷

Morphological Differences

Morphological factors influence the formant frequencies;²⁸ the physical characteristics of the vocal folds determine the voice source; and the manner in which the singer is formally or informally trained to use her instrument informs her manipulation of variables such as the length of the vocal tract and the thickness with which the vocal folds will come together. Is there, therefore, an underlying physical cause behind different vocal timbres? And, if so, are there correlations between race or/ethnicity and vocal

²⁴ The vocal folds are popularly termed vocal *chords* (probably a corruption of 'cords'), but as their shape is actually a fold, scientific literature on the voice refers to them as such.

²⁵ The vocal folds of a newborn baby measure around 3mm. In an adult they are about 9-20 mm.

²⁶ Frequencies that fit the resonator optimally are called resonance frequencies, or formant frequencies if the resonator is the human vocal tract. Most resonators have several resonance frequencies. For the vocal tract, the four to five lowest resonance frequencies are the most important ones.

²⁷ But the way in which the air is portioned out to pass over the vocal folds (for example as a big burst versus a measured flow) do influence the resulting timbre. It is the muscles in the torso that control the airflow, not the lungs themselves.

²⁸ Around 2800 Hz.

timbre? These speculations are answered by laryngologist Dr. Eugen Grabscheid, who concludes that “there is no physical difference whatsoever.” Dr. Wilburn J. Gould, who has conducted ultraspeed motion pictures to analyze vocal fold vibration, concurs: “The ratio of the Oriental larynx to the body is no different from that of other races” (New York Times, November 30, 1989).” Correspondingly, vocal pedagogy authority and scientist Richard Miller asserts that “fibroptic/stroboscopic observations reveal no racially classifiable features of uniform laryngeal construction (Miller 2004: 220).”²⁹ Miller adds,

The height or breadth of the forehead, the size of the cranium, the prominence of the occipital bone, the dimensions of the mandible, and the length and height of the nose bridge do not determine resonance. Contemporary speculations that a large nose ought to give an indication of greater resonance is not surprising, inasmuch as that notion was generally held by some teachers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who refused to accept singers who lacked large noses (105).

Contemporary vocal scientists agree there are no morphological differences that indicate race. Therefore, there should be no timbral differences based on race. However, as my opening example illustrated, and as we will see in greater detail later in this chapter, people do hear racially-based timbral differences. I argue that such differences are based on the flexibility and possibility of the instrument, and the choices made as to which aspects of an individual vocal timbre to bring forward. Thus expressive limitations are the results of choice of use rather than of physical premises.

Vocal sound is shaped by the size and shape of the vocal tract and the mouth cavity—both modified by the singer’s *manipulation*. Depending on the length and width

²⁹ There are no differences observed with regard to “vocal tract proportions, dimensions of the pharyngeal wall, shapes of the pyriform sinuses, or epiglottic activity (Miller 2004: 220).”

of the vocal tract, both of which may be changed by the singer, different frequencies are favored and, as a result, the resultant timbre changes. The opening or closing of the lips, the positioning of the tongue and the roof of the mouth together determine the overall sound as well its expressiveness. We hear various shapes and positions of the mouth, lips and tongue as different vowels. To test this idea, you can perform an experiment: without thinking about any particular vowel, simply putting your lips together in a “kissing position” and make a sound. The vowel sounded should be [o].³⁰ If you loosen your lips to a completely relaxed and relatively open position, the sound should be an [a]. If, from that position, you lift the middle of your tongue to touch the roof of your mouth, the sound will change to an [i]. Depending on how tight or relaxed your muscles are in any of these positions, different frequencies will be favored and your [o], [a], or [i] will change timbre accordingly.

Each vocal apparatus offers a vast range of sonic possibilities, of which we normally exploit only a limited range. Particular vocal timbres, which through their particularity might suggest physical limits to their timbral possibilities, rather embody the range of timbres that voice is asked to *perform*. Therefore, in addressing the question of whether we can “hear race” in vocal timbre, we may answer that we instead hear the results of vocal *usage choices*. Although the physical stature of the person constitutes his or her vocal limits, these limits fall substantially beyond the range within which each individual utilizes her instrument. The timbral differences we perceive are differences in style rather than in corporeally-determined timbral destiny. In other words, the timbral

³⁰ The brackets indicate the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

capacity of the human voice reaches far beyond the physical differences we attribute to race.

Voice Training

The ways we use our bodies and our voices physically shape the vocal apparatus. The characteristics of a singer's vocal timbre are formed by vocal training. Learning to use the vocal apparatus in a particular way not only contributes to the shaping of vocal timbre, but the behaviors learned in this training are also "written into" the texture of the body. Thus singing is a practice manifested in the physical entity, the body, as are other physical practices or activities. The way the voice is daily used, as any everyday physical activity, is discernable in the body. The patterns of our physical activities as female and male, as racially, nationally, and socioeconomically categorized people, shape our bodies, and thus shape the voice. And it is this *shaped voice* that we hear. There are therefore two bodies: first, there is the body with which we are born, which does not possess any inherent timbral limitations. Second, there is the body that is shaped over time, a body that most likely has been asked to take a form which expresses categories that matter in a given society.

The Vocal Body (i)

I term the process through which the material identified as an individual body is shaped the *vocal body*, whether it is shaped as a cultural artifact or by conscious training. Because the vocal body and the human body are housed together, it is difficult to discern that we listen to the vocal body, or even that the vocal body exists. I argue that because we cannot easily distinguish the vocal body, the altered body, we are led to believe that vocal timbre is the unmediated sound of an unaltered body. I also argue that it is imperative to recover this distinction in order to gain knowledge about the mechanisms involved in the process of racializing vocal timbre.

The Influence of Pedagogy

Before we go on to the ethnography of vocal pedagogues, it is necessary to explore the general consensus that the particular training a singer receives dramatically shapes the voice. I will offer two examples from vocal pedagogy, each illustrating a way in which the learning environment shapes voices.

During my sixteen years as a participant-observer in classical voice environments I have found that it is impossible to move in this milieu without hearing stories about voice teachers. Many of the most heated discussions surface when singers must choose a voice teacher. The debates regarding the pros and cons of joining a particular teacher's studio are intense and involved. If you were to listen in, you would hear that one teacher has a reputation for making students sound too dark and heavy; while another focuses so

much on the upper register that her students will not be able to bridge into the deeper part of their voices; yet a third teacher will somehow make the student's breathing so stiff that the resulting voice will sound inflexible. The students' conversations may focus on a given teacher's incorrect or unproductive technique, but students also acknowledge that the teacher is teaching to the best of her ability in order to achieve her timbral ideal. Students know from first-hand experience that these minute differences between pedagogical approaches have great impact.

Another major example of the ways different timbral and pedagogical approaches shape the voice may be found by comparing the national schools of singing. Perhaps the most well-known national schools of singing are the English, French, German and Italian. However, there are also the Nordic and Slavic schools of singing.³¹ The phrase *national school of singing* refers to a preferred tone quality and its related technique, which function symbiotically on a national and regional scale and result in differing pedagogical schemes and a corresponding shaping of the voice according to the national tone ideal (Miller 1997).

The preferred national tone is not a casual matter. The French Ministry of Culture, for example, employed official inspectors to observe regional conservatories of music in order to evaluate the vocal pedagogy. Richard Miller reports that in the post-World War II decades, some inspectors were especially adamant that their concept of proper onset³²

³¹ What is now referred to as the international style of singing is based in the Italian bel canto school, but is also flexible enough to sing in different regions without too much clash. The international school of singing, indeed, generally refers to the style practiced by singers who travel between the largest stages around the world.

³² A vocal onset is the way in which the beginning of a sound phrase is performed. This may be accomplished with an attack, or by "easing" more softly into the note. To those unconcerned with vocal technique this might not seem like such radical difference, but for vocal pedagogues and singers it is a very

be taught in French conservatories. The preferred onset among these inspectors was an “attack,” a very strong beginning that is created by a powerful inward thrust of the abdomen. As a result the vocal folds were forced to deal with a high level of airflow, and in response the larynx resisted the excess airflow by fixing the vocal folds in a single position. The result is a “held” sound that is slightly above pitch, with a pushed and sharp-sounding phonation. This sound is now characteristic of the French onset and—because the attack set up a tense position of the vocal folds—the French line (Miller 1997: xx).³³

We know that the sounds of these various schools are the results of aesthetic preference and vocal technique which accommodates this preference.³⁴ We know that they are not the unmediated expression of a people.³⁵ A national school of singing simply refers to the preferred tonal quality of a region (and the vocal technique which accommodates it), and of course does not necessarily indicate the nationality of the singer. A Norwegian singer may be educated in a conservatory in Germany and thus develop a German tone. Or, an Italian teacher might teach in Paris and pass on his or her Italian technique and tone ideal.

important matter. Lay listeners might not consciously register these different onset philosophies, but attentive listeners could potentially articulate an awareness of overall difference in the sound.

³³ In contrast, there is the Nordic “soft” onset wherein airflow precedes sound, the German *weicher Einsatz* (whisper onset), a reaction against the earlier *Sprenginsatz* (hard onset), and so on.

³⁴ Richard Miller notes that although there are recognizable national tonal preferences and techniques, no nation exhibits monolithic conformity. Miller estimates that over half of the teachers within a given national school adhere to the national tonal preference, while the remaining group of singers and teachers are devoted to international concepts (Miller 1997: xix). Tone preference is also influenced by teachers’ migrations and relocations. We may see, for example, that many German teachers associate themselves with the historic international Italianate School as a result of the legacy of the vocal pedagogy master G.B. Lamperti, who taught in Munich.

³⁵ In addition, a preference for a particular repertoire can affect the sound. The repertoire’s particular method of setting, and demanding certain technical things from, the voice will shape the voice.

It is also important for this discussion to note that within the geographical area of one national school there will be many different spoken dialects. In some areas, the dialects are so different that they are close to separate languages. In countries such as Switzerland, students at a single conservatory might have four different mother tongues. However, phonation and, as a result, pronunciation are different in song than they are in speech, and singers learn very carefully how to pronounce words in singing, even in their first language. Even singers with different mother tongues or dialects are unified under one national school, or a single teacher's tonal ideal. In summary, both of these examples from the world of classical vocal practice exemplify the malleability of the human voice and the enormous impact a teacher's tonal ideal and pedagogy generally produce on the ultimate sound of a classical singer's voice.

Having established some essential facts about the vocal apparatus (that its expressive and timbral ranges are larger than are the variations we ascribe to physical differences), and having provided some background regarding the profound role of pedagogy in forming students' vocal timbre, it becomes possible to introduce my ethnography of vocal teachers, conducted in 2005-2006 in southern California.

Conversations Based on Scenes From the Vocal Studio

During the aforementioned year I conducted thirteen interviews with vocal pedagogues and students, from Bachelor's degree through Doctor of Musical Arts

(DMA) candidates.³⁶ In our conversations we discussed what constitutes vocal timbre, how vocal timbre is developed, and what kinds of information vocal timbre conveys about the singer. When we discussed correct singing in terms of vocal weight and color, crucial problems in vocal pedagogy, issues of race, ethnicity and vocal timbre arose. In this part of the interview all but two teachers told me that they can always tell the ethnicity of the singer by his or her vocal timbre.

I will offer some general examples of how race, ethnicity and vocal timbre are viewed among some people in the vocal pedagogical community.³⁷ Despite confirmation that there is no direct correlation between race, ethnicity, and vocal timbre, strong general sentiments regarding the corporeal reality of race and ethnicity are played out in vocal pedagogical practice. I will focus first on two interviews with teachers, and then on interviews with students who have chosen different strategies for relating to racialized vocal timbre.

Throughout the interviews with teachers two main topics related to guiding the development of vocal timbre surfaced: 1) the question of what constitutes healthy and natural singing for the student, and 2) the need to avoid homogenizing students in favor of allowing each singer's true timbre to arise. It is interesting to observe, though, that the practices considered by teachers to be "healthy" and "honest" ultimately fell along lines of race and ethnicity. That is, what I describe as racialized vocal timbre is conceived by

³⁶ Most of the interviews took place in teachers' private studios. In one case the interview was conducted in a coffee shop, and on a few occasions interviews took place by telephone.

³⁷ Kristyn R. Moon's (2005; 23-48) work on the Chinese American Vaudevillian Lee Tung Foo and his relationship with voice teacher Margaret Blake Alverson in early twentieth century California is a unique study of the dynamic between the teacher's imagination of her student in terms of Alverson's conception of Chinese American's musical abilities and the ways in which Foo developed as a singer. Moon describes it as a relationship that "broke racial barriers but never transcended their limits (23)." See also Alverson's own account of the story in Alverson (1913: 161-166).

voice teachers as simply a healthy way of singing that promotes a non-homogenized sound.

Dorothy,³⁸ a soprano and professor of voice for seventeen years, told me that she can invariably identify whether a student is, for example, Armenian, Russian or Korean from the student's vocal timbre, but she frames her classification of students as a concern about *vocal health*:

There are principles of what is healthy, a balanced sound and all of that, and if [voice teachers] observe that rule, then, how can they not hear an Armenian sound or Korean sound and cultivate it? (Interview with voice teacher, June 20, 2005).

With this statement Dorothy reasons that if the voice is trained along principles designed to promote a healthy, balanced sound, it will logically display its ethnicity. Rather than considering this strategy as a race- or ethnicity-based categorization of voices, Allison, another long time teacher, views the sounds she associates with what she calls “ethnic timbre” simply as “the unique color” and the vocal “fingerprint” of the student. Pedagogy then becomes a matter of bringing out the “true sound” of the student's voice, and that true sound happens to be connected to his or her perceived race or ethnicity. Allison regards this pedagogical philosophy as a means to allow each student to maintain an element of individuality within the highly cultivated and stylized world of classical singing. During the interview process I frequently heard such statements regarding the individuality of a voice, by which my interviewees meant, I believe, the opposite: “an ethnic vocal timbre.” Vocal coach Ann goes so far as to criticize ignorant

³⁸ The voice teachers and students are not mentioned by their legal names. The names used in this text are pseudonyms.

teachers who have not been exposed to a variety of “ethnic timbres” for “homogenizing” their students’ sounds.

This criticism of underexposed teachers who cannot properly develop students’ individual or ethnic timbres suggests that there exists a necessary education process which teaches how different ethnicities are supposed to sound. The celebrated African-American tenor Vinson Cole tells the story of how he heard Martina Arroyo’s voice—considered by many to be the quintessential representative of African-American timbre—on the radio for many years before he learned from a picture that she was black (Hampton 2005). “You come into this world like a blank page,” says Cole. “You don’t know what you like or don’t like. You don’t come into the world with prejudices. They depend on what you’re taught and brought up with.” Cole learned at the age of eighteen that Arroyo was African-American. This suggests that there are no inherent, universally read categories of vocal timbre, but rather that we are socialized to understand a constructed vocal-timbral code. Because Cole was not yet socialized to read timbre as a racial marker within opera he was not able to discriminate between racialized timbres, and at first was unable to distinguish the sound of constructed blackness.

Most of the voice teachers I spoke with stressed the importance of being literate readers of “ethnic” vocal timbres. One wonders, however, what is being read. When we began to discuss what might “cause” the varied timbres of different ethnicities, Allison explained that the South American timbre is influenced by Latin people’s connection to their bodies; in her view Latin cultures operate from the body while North American cultures operate from the mind. She explained that singers’ connections to their bodies affect their sound.

The Mexican culture, for example, is, to me, a very visceral culture. It's not a super heady culture. I think we in the United States of America tend to be more cognitive. You know the whole puritan ethics where sex is bad and you just disallow that you have anything below your waist. You know, that is a primary drive in people. (Interview with voice teacher, June 20, 2005).

I asked Ann whether she believed that some cultures come by that body-voice connection more naturally, so that even if a singer from one of those cultures studies with an American teacher, or a teacher who is not particularly focused on its development, his voice would still sound the connection that was "in" him from the beginning, and thus would differ from the voice of an Anglo-American growing up in the U.S. Ann responded:

Yes. I think [Latin Americans] naturally have that connection [...] They're [] connected to their bodies [...] and their guts (said with throaty, "gut sound") and they make music from their hearts. In European repertoire they talk about that "she broke my heart, I will just lay down and die now," (said with a very proper voice) and in Hispanic music, the Latino music: "She broke my heart, she ripped it out of my chest and stomped it on the floor!" (nearly screaming) And that's how their music sounds. It's very gut. Americans—we don't operate on that level, we tend to be a visual or cognitive society. (Interview with voice teacher, June 20, 2005)

It is worth noting that the categories outlined above are closely connected to binaries and classification systems developed by European colonists in an "observer-imposed" or "top down" mode, reflecting the hierarchy through which the categories were devised. How do such assumptions affect pedagogy?

The exceptionally close relationship between voice student and teacher complicates the ways the teacher's attitudes regarding race and vocal timbre might affect

the student. It is generally estimated that it takes at least ten years for a singer to master the fundamentals of vocal technique. During this time, the student must trust the teacher unreservedly, as the teacher is truly *building* the student's voice. Together teacher and student go through more and less successful times—times in which the student is asked to practice certain exercises that might not make sense in the moment, or to be patient “because the voice will sound like this for a while.”

It is generally acknowledged that to choose a teacher is to choose a set of ears that the student must trust unconditionally. As we know, the sound of the voice never sounds the same way to the person who sings as it does to those who listen. Because the sound is produced in the singer's body it is transferred to her ears not only through the ear channels as external sound entering the body, but also through internal bones and flesh; it is transferred to the listener's ears only as external sound. The singer is thus in a unique position: she is not necessarily the best judge of what constitutes the sound of her voice. The teacher is an expert listener, chosen to provide the most trustworthy information about the sound of the student's voice, and about how, and in which direction, it needs to be developed. With this description I attempt to convey an extreme relationship, the premise of which is that the student fully trusts, and commits her voice to the teacher.

African-American soprano Shana is a singer who has struggled in her relationship with voice teachers, and has been forced to set limits as to what kinds of ears she can truly trust (Interview with voice student March 25, 2006). Now in the process of pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree, Shana described her experiences with her four main voice teachers. The first and third teachers were white and the second and fourth, her current teacher, are African American. Shana told me that the white teachers' general

pedagogical schemes required that she model sound in order to change her voice to conform to their ideals. The African-American teachers were not concerned with sound, but rather with vocal function: how to use the voice.

For singers like Shana, there are problems inherent in the relationship between the idea of the “typical” African-American timbre and her voice type, a soubrette soprano. The stereotypical African-American classical voice is a full, heavy, broad and dark sound. This is the opposite of the soubrette soprano, which is a light, lyrical, and slender voice type. Shana found that non-African-American teachers did not hear her voice as it was, but attempted to direct it according to preconceived notions of African-American vocal timbre and thereby caused vocal damage. Shana reports that this is not an uncommon experience for aspiring African-American classical singers. As a consequence, an informal network for recommending teachers sympathetic to the particularities of each voice has developed among African-American singers.

Marina, a very successful young Armenian-American singer,³⁹ has a very clear sense of what it means to sound Armenian, and has gone to great lengths to preserve this timbre. She told me that the Armenian sound is on the “darker side,” and explained that it originated in the Armenian people’s history as victims of genocide. Marina says that her voice automatically picks up the truest timbre “the real, real timbre that I have” when singing Armenian repertoire. And she feels an obligation to “always remember that timbre in everything I do (Interview with voice student, July 20, 2005).”

Before trusting a teacher with her voice, Marina makes sure the teacher understands her view of Armenian vocal timbre and is willing to work with her to

³⁹ Marina has been very successful in national opera competitions.

preserve that sound. She told me: “First and foremost, I feel Armenian. There are a lot of influences I have as an American, for example, being mentally a lot more modernized, and I think differently than a lot of Armenians do, but in my actual music, it has not really changed.” She feels that she doesn’t understand American music, but Armenian music is what she “feels inside,” and that whenever she approaches music she does so as a “darker person” (Interview with voice student, July 20, 2005).

Marina talks about vocal *darkness* as an essentially Armenian component. As recent studies by Johanne Blank (1997) and Elizabeth Wood (1994) have indicated, darker ranges and timbres are drawn upon in the operatic world to signify Otherness. In Marina’s experience, “dark [timbral] quality scares [American] teachers because they want everything bright and forward.” In opera literature mezzos and altos have been liminal and transgressive figures. Born and brought up in Southern California, Marina is fluent in most aspects of Armenian and American cultures. Switching between them, she chooses the Armenian for her artistic, expressive mode; she chose the American when she rebelled against a marriage her parents wished her to enter in her late teens. The Armenian community around Los Angeles is very supportive of Marina. She often performs at their cultural events and gets constant feedback about how Armenian her voice sounds. Guarding and developing what she considers the Armenian component in her vocal timbre—the peculiar darkness—gives her certain cultural capital and Armenian authenticity within her own community, and an exotic tint in the broader musical environment with which she is involved.

We have seen that the development of a singer’s vocal timbre is a contested site—a site wherein bodies are marked as racial, and upon which colonial ideas are re-

inscribed. It is also a site where singers themselves, by their choice of a teacher, are able to take charge and shape their vocal timbres according to their own ideals.

Sonic Perceptual Framework

Growing up in Scandinavia, where most people are of Scandinavian descent, I was surprised to discover how often a classical singer's vocal timbre was explained or simply referred to in racial or ethnic terms in the United States. This was always framed in the most positive terms, usually complimenting singers on their "interesting" timbre. Yet it was quite surprising that these timbral "fingerprints" fell along "Othered" racial and ethnic lines, and that I was now placed in that category.

My story illustrates the instability of the evaluation of timbre. Allison addressed this issue when she pointed out that it is teachers' responsibility to familiarize themselves with "ethnic" timbres. Teachers in homogeneous Norway had not had the opportunity to become literate in "ethnic" timbres, and thus my voice had not, before my move to the United States, been heard as Korean. I had had no intimate contact with Korean culture or language. My mother tongue is Norwegian, I was trained in the Nordic school of singing, and we have already seen that physical structure does not cause so-called "ethnic" timbre. Regardless, teachers in the United States heard my vocal timbre as Korean.

The only factor that could offer clues to my (lost) Koreanness was visual. D.L. Rubin (1992) addresses the impact of the visual aspect of a listening experience. In an experiment by Rubin, a person with American English as a mother tongue recorded a

lecture. This single recording was paired with either a picture of what appeared to be an Asian lecturer, or a picture of what appeared to be an Anglo-American lecturer. Subjects (American college undergraduates) were asked to listen to the tape paired with, by random selection, either picture. Questions were asked regarding the clarity of speech, level of accent, and coherence of the lecture. Although the speech (the recorded lecture) was identical for each picture, the recording paired with the picture of what appeared to be an Asian lecturer rated much lower in all three categories. This study speaks to the issue exposed by my ethnography, namely that listeners *hear what they see*, and frame the listening using a pre-established network of knowledge about, for example, the stereotypical Latin singer. As a consequence, the sonic component of a vocal performance is only one aspect of the listening experience.

Knowledge About the Influence of Geographical location on perception

Although this sociolinguistic study dealt with speech, the aspect of the study I find compelling and relevant to this work is the manner in which it was concluded that any preconceived notions regarding the speaker (or singer) frame the listening experience. In Rubin's study, the visual aspect framed the opinion formed by the listener by tapping into a set of preconceived ideas regarding what an Asian versus an Anglo person might sound like, and even how coherent their lectures were likely to be. And in the Nancy Niedzielski study (1999), prior knowledge framing the listening led people to hear certain accent traits associated with the person to whom they thought they were

listening. I suggest that voice teachers, by the same token, assume an entire set of ideas regarding the student's vocal timbre based on visual cues, as, for instance in my case, there are no sonic cues that could suggest Koreanness.⁴⁰

The Modern Western Classical Vocal Ideal

Why is difference read as a non-normative classical vocal timbre? Why might vocal pedagogy reproduce such colonial ideas so heavily?

The so-called modern western voice developed in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴¹ The new singing was a formalization of vocal pedagogy, in terms of both technique and ideology, and it was grounded in scientific principles. John Potter has observed that the same ideologies are still present in current vocal practices (Potter 1998: 47). Until the nineteenth century discussions about singing were concerned with rules of ornamentation and proper pronunciation—vocal production was hardly ever publicly debated (Castallengo 2005).⁴² Although a few treatises on singing were written in the eighteenth century (such as, for example, Italian Pier Francesco Tosi's (1723),⁴³ the nineteenth

⁴⁰ One might argue that what my voice teachers detected was a generic sense of difference due to my Nordic sound and Norwegian accent in speech. If this is the case, it nonetheless addresses the same issue: the visual aspect cued listeners to interpret my sound as Korean. I suggest that when highly skilled listeners such as voice teachers interpret my sound as Korean, their interpretations are due to visual rather than sonic cues.

⁴¹ I argue that the European environment in which the modern vocal ideal and pedagogy was formulated has substantively shaped contemporary American vocal pedagogy not only because there has been such a constant flow of singers and teachers between the United States and various European countries, but also because American classical vocal pedagogy finds its roots in the teachings of European vocal pedagogues such as Garcia II, discussed later in this chapter.

⁴² Logopedics Phoniatics Vocology (2005: 163–170).

⁴³ The most well known was Italian Pier Francesco Tosi (c1646-1732), who wrote *Opinioni de' cantori*

century saw an abundance of vocal manuals and singers' autobiographies in which technique and ideology were discussed extensively. Vocal technique was becoming an object of public debate. This interest in improved singing technique may be explained musically: performance spaces were becoming larger, thus the instrumental forces which accompanied singers became louder due to increased numbers of players and technical improvements in instrument design. Hector Berlioz, for instance, wrote in 1832 about his problems in performing *A travers chants* in a large hall within which only a few singers could project proficiently (Berlioz 1862 quoted in MacClintock 1994: 420-432). New repertoire also called for vocal-technical improvements. However, despite an increasing amount of challenging repertoire from the mid-eighteenth century, there seem to have been no major historical changes in vocal technique (Potter 51) before the advent of the scientific investigation of the voice.

Post-Garcian Voice: The Application of Science in Vocal Pedagogy

According to Potter the change from “natural” to “modern” was prompted and implemented by a new school of “scientifically oriented singing teachers (1998: 54).” In *The Art of Singing* (1978), a survey of vocal pedagogical literature from the period 1771-1927, author Brent Jeffrey Monohan concludes that the practice of drawing on scientific data began with Manuel Garcia II (1805-1906),⁴⁴ an author of numerous treatises on

antichi e moderni, o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato. Bologna, ([1723] 1968).

⁴⁴ Garcia II was born into a family highly invested in classical singing. His father, Manuel Garcia I, was a lauded singer,⁴⁴ a voice teacher and the author of a voice manual.⁴⁴ His daughters Maria Malibran (1808-1836) and Pauline Viardot⁴⁴ (1821-1910) became two of the most celebrated singers of their generation and

voice, a teacher of many celebrated singers,⁴⁵ and (in 1854) the inventor of the laryngoscope,⁴⁶ which marks this shift toward a scientific attitude. Garcia II's impact on vocal pedagogy was so profound that the vocal technique before him is generally referred to as the pre-Garcian voice.⁴⁷ By 1861 scientific and empirical data were equally represented in the literature, and by 1891 almost every major work, Mohanan observes, contained references to breathing, phonation and resonance from an anatomical and physiological perspective. Physicians and scientists, as well as musicians, authored some of these pedagogical works. Treatises on singing before 1840 were penned exclusively by singers and voice teachers, so the contributions of these additional disciplines to the literature on singing represents a radical shift in which the *scientist* who knew the human build became an authority on vocal matters.

It is perhaps not mere coincidence that the so-called modern classical voice, described by pedagogical treatises based for the first time on scientific research, was initiated in the early nineteenth century. This was a time that saw numerous public exhibitions of and research on the human body—often enabled by (and used to rationalize) colonial pursuits and expansion (see Figure 1 for one example of this). Garcia II himself had the unique opportunity to study human anatomy when he enlisted in the French army during its 1830 invasion of Algeria. In military hospitals he had access to research subjects, allowing him to map the anatomy of the human vocal mechanism. The

Garcia II, who never felt he was fit for the singing career set out for him by his father, pursued the pedagogical aspects of singing after Garcia I's death.

⁴⁵ Today the best-known of his students are probably Jenny Lind, Mathilde Marchesi, Julius Stockhausen, and Mathilda Wagner.

⁴⁶ The laryngoscope, devised around a series of mirrors, is a system still in use by physicians.

⁴⁷ The pre-Garcian voice is thought to be closer to speech because of the way the larynx was held close to the position used in speech (while Garcian and current technique asks for a lowered larynx) and the preference of forward jaw position, a practice that would prove effective in making vowels sound more speech-like (Potter 1998: 54).

scientific anatomical knowledge of the vocal apparatus⁴⁸ along with studies by Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894), the leading physicist and acoustician at the time, served as the basis for his vocal pedagogy (Donald V. Paschke 1975: vi). Garcia II's work, *Mémoire sur la voix humaine* (1840), received an acknowledgement from the French Academy of Sciences in 1840 after he demonstrated his theory of the formation of vocal registers and timbres and their application in vocal classifications (viii). From this we may conclude that Garcia II's work was both influenced by and relevant to vocal pedagogy as well as the areas of anatomy and acoustics.

Garcia II's application of science in order to forward vocal technique conformed to a general mid-eighteenth century zeitgeist represented by the systematic classification of plants, animals and people. It is interesting to note that Garcia II was trained in music theory and history by François-Joseph Fétis, notable most saliently for his stark theory of the differences between human races and their (assumed) consequently differing abilities to comprehend music. It is not unlikely that Fétis's philosophy of race and music influenced Garcia's work on mapping the human voice. By measuring, weighing, and classifying—in short, by taxonomizing—the world, it was believed that man could master his environment. These constructed taxonomies served as the basis for a new world order. For example, assumptions about the cognitive effects of skull size and shape served to rationalize the connection between race, musical understanding and aesthetics. French musicologist and educator François-Joseph Fétis wrote in the preface to his general history of music:

⁴⁸ Donald V. Paschke's Introduction to the 1975 translation of Garcia II's *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing: Part Two* (editions of 1847 and 1872).

The history of music is inseparable from appreciation of the special properties belonging to the races that have cultivated it. This essentially ideal art owes its existences to the humans who create it...it is the product of human faculties which are distributed unequally among peoples as well as individuals. (Quoted in Pasler 2004: 26).

The belief that human anatomical structure determines human capacity of being affected by sound is, in the words of Fétis, that “a feeling for music, for nations as well as individuals is related to the shape of the brain” (quoted in Pasler 26), combined with the establishment of knowledge that the shape of the head and trachea affect the timbre of the voice has profoundly, if indirectly, conditioned the ways in which there is a perceived timbral connection between race and voice. And Garcia, we will see, begins to conceptualize how singers’ differing skull shapes and sizes would result in timbral differences.

Time and Social Power

Anne McClintock (1995) writes that the sense of time promoted by the imperial science hovered around two centralizing tropes: the invention of *panoptical time*, “global history consumed – at a glance – in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility,” and *anachronistic space*, the simultaneous existence of different temporal zones and with different levels of progress (see Figure 1) (McClintock 1995: 36-37).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ McClintock points out that G.W.F. Hegel was one of the most influential philosophers to promote this notion, imagining Africa as not only a different geographical space, but also a different temporal zone. Africa, writes Hegel, “us no Historical part of the world...it has no movement or development to exhibit” (quoted in McClintock 1995: 40-41).

The larger scope of the project, following Charles Darwin and Carl Linneus, was, in the words of McClintock, the “collect[ion], assembl[ing] and map[ing]” (36) not only of natural spaces, but also of historical time. The taxonomizing project that at first had been applied to nature was later, with social Darwinism, applied to cultural history (37).

The invention of the archaic and its conception as coterminous with Western progress, McClintock suggests, was central to the discourse of racial science (as well as to urban surveillance of women and the working class). So-called archaic spaces were viewed as “living archives” of the primitive (41). McClintock has pointed out that in order to meet the empirical standards of the natural scientists, visible stigmata that would prove the “historical anachronism of the degenerate classes”⁵⁰ was necessary (41). One answer, as Sander Gilman (1985) has observed, was found in the body of the African woman.⁵¹

Drawing on findings from his own anatomical research, Garcia II was one of the first to understand that the lower larynx position had to do with vocal timbre rather than with register. His formulation resulted in what was termed *voix sombrée*⁵² (as opposed to the traditional *voix blanche*),⁵³ which is the foundation of modern operatic sound. The previous technique of singing with the high larynx position, *voix blanche*, was described

⁵⁰ Georges Curvier measured Saartjie Baartman’s skeleton and compared her skeleton as the “lowest” human species with the orangutan’s, the “highest ape.”

⁵¹ McClintock has noted that the Victorian view of the African woman’s body became the prototype of “the invention of primitive atavism (1995: 41).”

⁵² Tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez, performing at the Paris Opéra in 1837, is the first singer known to have sung using the *voix sombrée*. He had developed the upper part of his chest voice to “contre-ut”, maintaining ease and volume as well as the timbre “somber.” Doctores Diday and Pétrequin wrote first about the *voix sombrée* as a “fundamental revolution” (Castellengo 165). *Contra* Diday and Pétrequin, who imagined that this sound was caused by an entirely new vocal mechanism, Garcia II understood that it was a timbral distinction.

⁵³ *Voix blanche* is a singing voice closer to speech, referred to earlier. *Voix sombrée*, a product of the lower larynx position, is what Johan Sundberg implies is the definition of an operatic voice, a voice with the singer’s formant.

by G. Oscar Russell (1931)⁵⁴ as failing to promote a “musical” vowel. Rather, the vowels produced by this position are, according to Russell “flat,” “metallic” (145) “piercing” and “barbaric” (151). In his discussion of the role of the vocal tract and tongue for “good tone production” ([1949] 1967: 110), William Vennard, a leading twentieth century American voice teacher and researcher, draws on Russell’s estimation of the different vowels’ “desirability” (111). *Voix blanche*, the timbral ideal prevalent before the use of science in vocal pedagogy, is conceived as the tone of an untrained voice, as sound before it entered the realm of scientific knowledge.

In the diagrams created in 1914 by esteemed soprano and voice teacher Lili Lehman (Figures 2, 3, 4) we see that a notional connection between skull shape and size lived on into the twentieth century. Even in the very late twentieth century, when I was a vocal student, Lehman’s pedagogical text was recommended by many of my voice teachers. If we juxtapose Lehman’s vocal pedagogical diagrams with charts which served to illustrate the relative intelligence and capacity of different people (Figure 1) on the basis of skull shape and size – a prevalent idea at the time Garcia II developed his pedagogy – it is understandable that from the moment human anatomy became part of the vocal timbral equation, the idea that vocal timbre would sonically reveal racial essence was implied.

With the institutionalization of Garcia II’s *voix sombre*, *voix blanche* became a symbol of a time before progress. In this way an anachronistic space was generated, in

⁵⁴ Russell was an American speech pathologist educated in European universities; he received a Masters Degree from Columbia University. According to Judy Duchan’s short history of speech pathology in America, Russell studied in Berlin and Koenigsberg from 1910-1913 and in Paris, Lyon, Madrid, and Vienna from 1923-1925. http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~duchan/new_history/hist19c/subpages/russell.html (Accessed July 1, 2007).

which timbres from before the advent of scientific research in vocal pedagogy and timbres developed as a result of scientific investigations sounded side by side.⁵⁵ As singers of non-Caucasian origin successfully sing classical and operatic repertoire, we see that this anachronistic timeline is translated into a sense that each singer has her own unique timbre and, as Dorothy put it, “[t] here are principles of what is healthy, a balanced sound.” How can voice teachers, “if they hear an Armenian sound or Korean sound,” not “cultivate it”? As *voix blanche* represented the voice before scientific progress and *voix sombre* represented the voice after it, “ethnic voices” (Armenian, Latin, African-American and so on)⁵⁶ are the new *voix blanche*, while the “non-ethnic” normative voice is the new *voix sombre*. The notion of panoptical time is therefore present in the operatic world. While listeners do not necessarily imagine the voice of the non-Caucasian to be inferior, it is heard as a voice of difference. In opera we may see this idea play out in the music written for characters representing roles of difference, for example in the assignment of liminal characters to darker voice fachs such as bass, baryton, alto and mezzo-soprano; and in the casting of singers of non-Caucasian origin in such liminal roles (Eidsheim 2004, Oby 1998).⁵⁷

The intellectual milieu in which modern vocal ideals and pedagogy were formulated was one in which musical faculties were believed to be connected to the size and shape of the skull. It was an environment in which knowledge of the human voice in

⁵⁵ Grant Olwage has made a similar argument in regards to Victorian singing styles and South-African choral singing existing side by side in South Africa (Olwage 2004: 203-226).

⁵⁶ In my earlier research I found that singers of non-Caucasian origin frequently are cast in any role that is representing a figure of Otherness. For example, Camilla Williams, the first African-American female singer to sing on a major American opera stage, the New York City opera, debuted as Madame Butterfly which depicts a Japanese character, in 195x. The roles frequently given non-Caucasian singers are Madame Butterfly, Carmen, and Aida.

particular and anatomy in general was based on progress in medical research, enabled by colonial force and fueled by the need to justify colonial activities. In such an environment the voice, an instrument intimately tied to the body, an instrument that resonates in the head, in the skull, occupies a very peculiar position. If colonial conceptions of the voice position some humans and societies outside historical time, they also listen to the sound of that temporal constellation. If, as Foucault has stated, new knowledge produces new forms of power, then what kinds of power are produced when knowledge regarding vocal pedagogy is based on research enabled by colonial force and the rationalization of colonial expansion?⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Here I paraphrase Jann Pasler's question regarding the European consumption of photographs of musicians and instruments taken on foreign expeditions (Pasler 2004: 41).

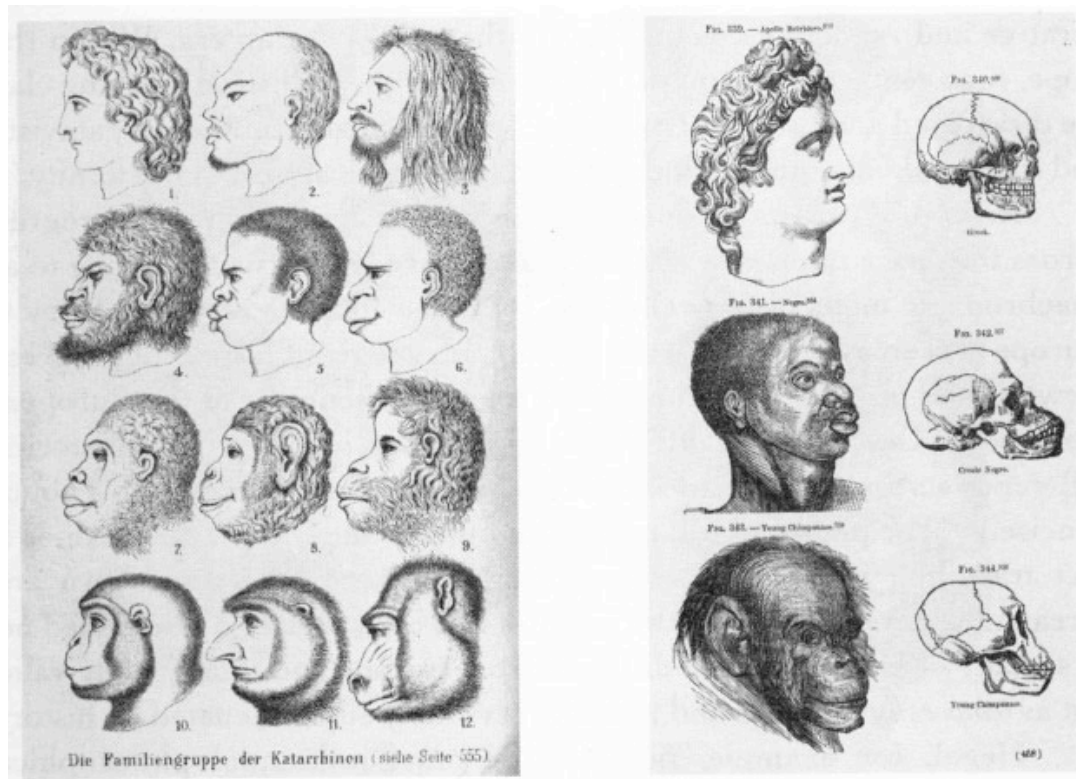
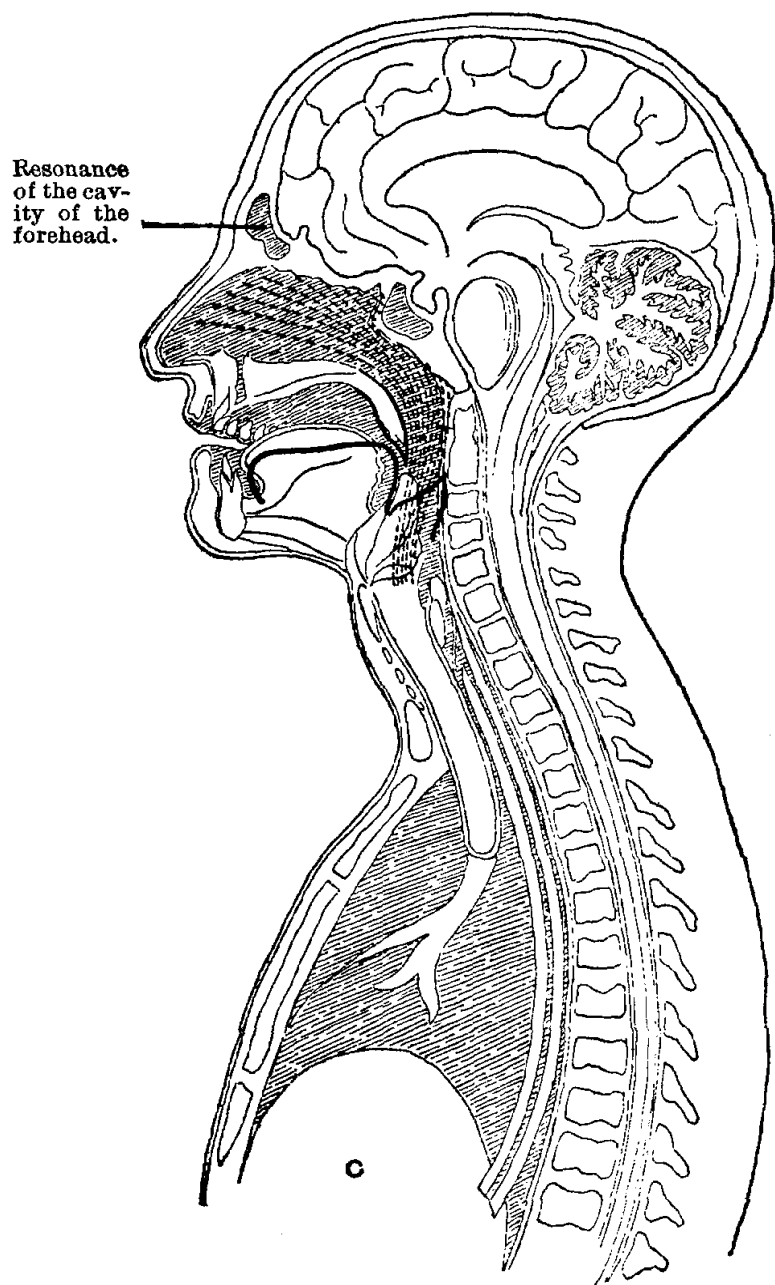


Figure 1

LEFT: "The Family Group of the Katarrhinen": Inventing the Family of Man
 RIGHT: Panoptical Time: Progress Consumed at a Glance (McClintock 1995: 59).



lines denote division of the breath in the resonance of the head cavities, high range

Figure 2 From Lilli Lehmann 1921: 19

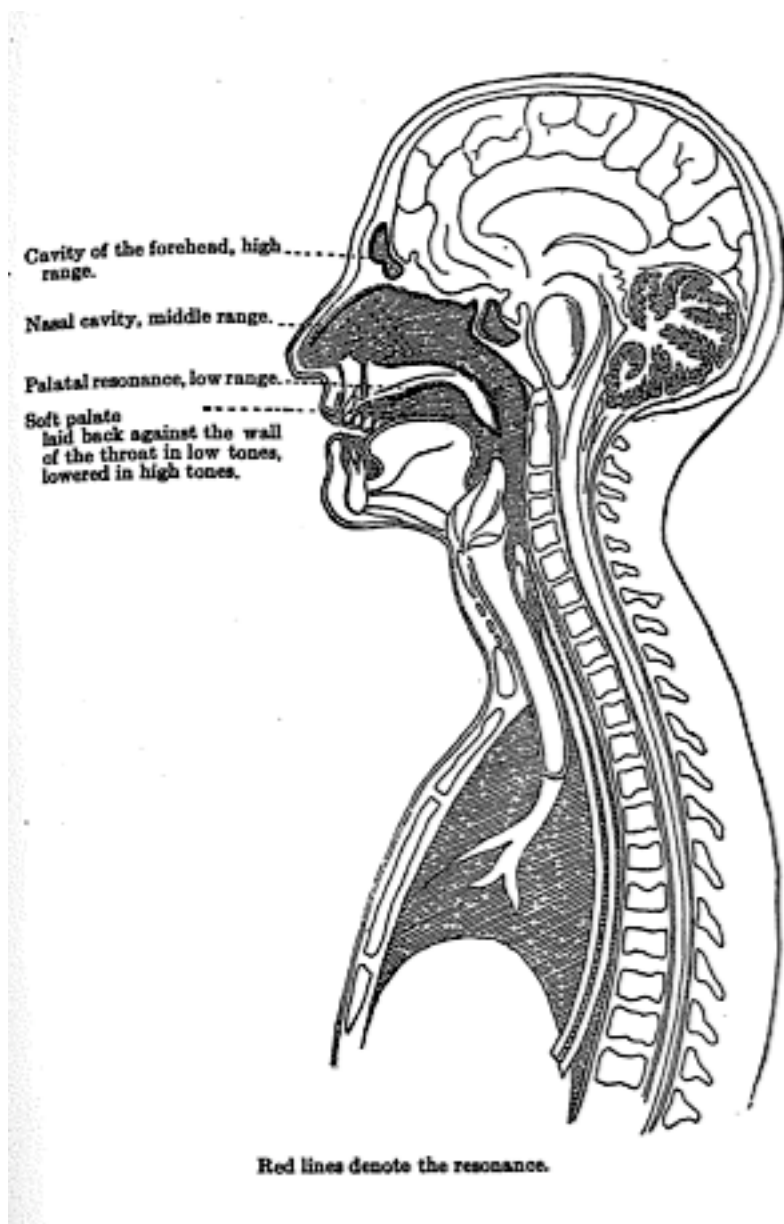
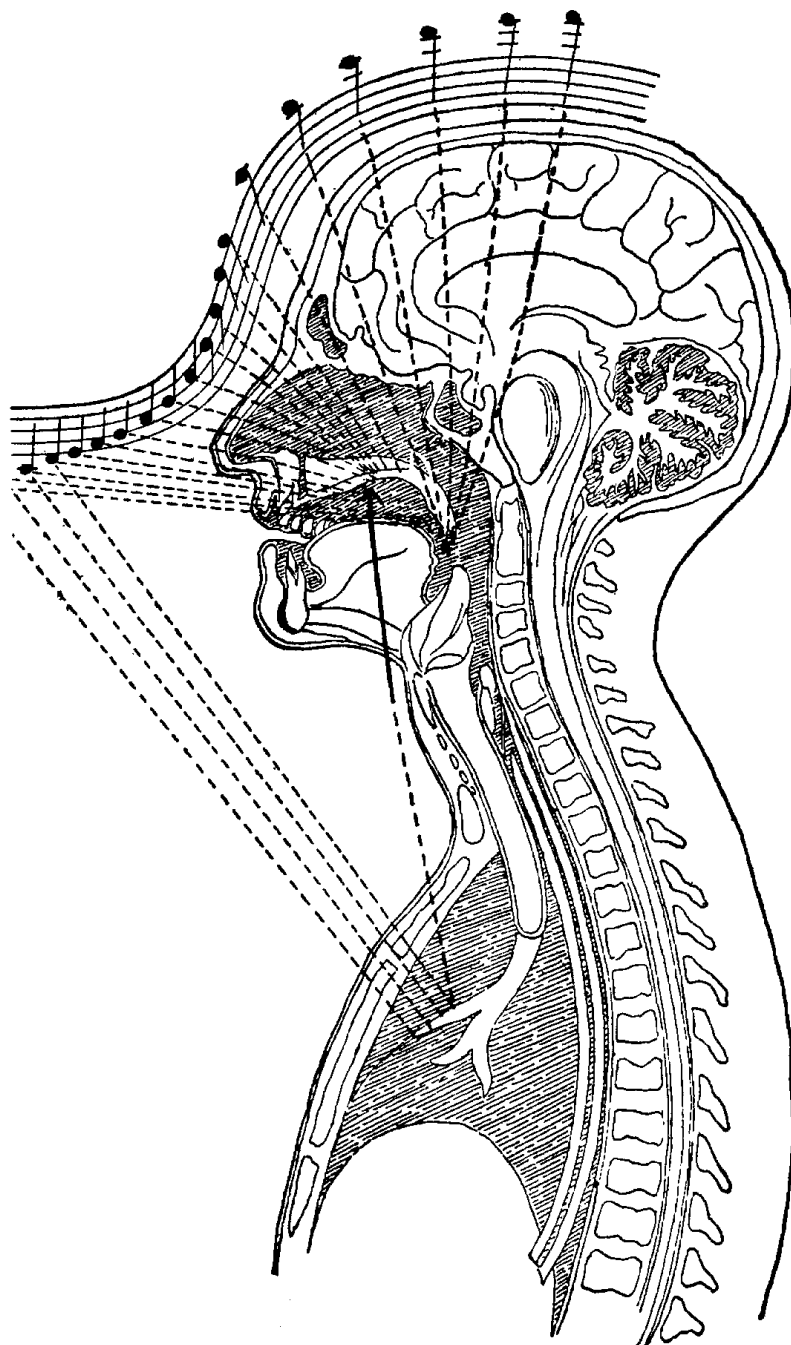


Figure 3 From Lilli Lehmann 1921: 43



lines denote vocal sensations of soprano and tenor singers

Figure 4 From Lilli Lehmann 1921:99

The Pedagogy of Whiteness: Taxonomies of Vocal Timbre

We saw in the interviews that vocal pedagogues today are still invested in the process of uncovering sonic difference between voices based on visual difference between bodies. The curious aspect of this investment is the way in which the “natural,” “healthy,” or “individual” voice is aligned with a particular race or ethnicity according to deep-held notions of essential differences between people based on their physical measurements.

This alignment may be seen in social evolutionists’ charts of man⁵⁹ in which, in the words of McClintock, “progress [is] consumed at a glance (1995: 39).” Modern classical vocal pedagogy was founded on scientific principles that sought to map measurable difference between people, and it was shaped at a time when the musics of different peoples were also mapped along the timeline of pre-history and progress. Formal singing is thus placed in a double bind. According to this worldview singing is not only sound emitted from a racialized body, but also the expression defined by Fétis as “the product of human faculties which are distributed unequally among people as well as individuals (quoted in Pasler 2004: 26).”

Voice science was established during a time when the human body was measured in order to provide information regarding differences that could justify colonial demand for domination and subordination. The voice occupies the body and therefore, according to the new scientific discoveries, it was possible to measure and taxonomize. The assumed supremacy of Western repertoire, thought, and culture was the ideological

⁵⁹ Women were disregarded in the theorizing of historical progress and left to the realm of nature (McClintock 1995: 39).

environment in which modern vocal science and techniques were established. I suggest that the theory of the superiority of the Aryan race based on measures of skull size has in subtle and immeasurable ways affected our modern approach, perception, development and desire for voices within the classical repertoire.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire cautions that pedagogical models reflect structures of power which education seeks to uphold:

If we accept education in this richer and more dynamic sense of acquiring a critical capacity and intervention in reality, we immediately know that there is no such thing as neutral education. All education has an intention, a goal, which can only be political (quoted in hooks 1989: 101).

Or, it can, through its system, seek to destroy current structures of power:

Either it mystifies reality by rendering it impenetrable and obscure—which leads people to a blind march through incomprehensible labyrinths or it unmasks the economic and social structures which are determining the relationships of exploitation and oppression among persons, knocking down labyrinths and allowing people to walk their own road. So we find ourselves confronted with a clear option: to educate for liberation or to educate for domination (Ibid.).

Although I will not attempt to compare the circumstances and lives of underprivileged farm workers in Brazil to young North American classical singers, there are some significant similarities. The foundation on which pedagogy is grounded reflects and perpetuates the ideological lens through which the educator views the student. That lens is not neutral, but defines within it the possibilities and results that can be imagined for the students. For Freire, education contains the possibility to destroy or maintain a system of power. Classical vocal pedagogy *maintains* a system—by labeling and

physically and sonically shaping “ethnic” timbres within their own timbral classification system—that strengthens and perpetuates a center and defines its borders.

In the introduction to the second translation of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Richard Schull described Freire’s unveiling of the seemingly innocent practice of passing down “merely facts” in clear terms:

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Richard Schull in the introduction on Freire 16).

In order to understand the dynamic of the construction of race in classical vocal timbre, it is imperative to study the *pedagogy* through which these notions are transmitted. When we hear a singer who possesses what we recognize as a “typical African-American” vocal timbre, we hear the sound of a mediated voice, the singer’s body shaped by the logic of a social system. Because the voice is situated in the internal spaces of the body, it is difficult to discern the physical shaping that has taken place during the training process. The transformation of the instrument is manifest in the muscles, ligaments and habits of the body. When the singer graduates to the professional stage her vocal body is already formed, and at that point comfortably reproduces constructed categories of race. Ironically, as a consequence, although the vocal body and its sound are products of ideology and pedagogy, the vocal sound itself actually seems to confirm a logic of race and ethnicity.

The Pedagogy of Whiteness: Constructing the Vocal Body

In order to begin to draw attention to the distinction between an unmarked and a marked vocal body, it is crucial to look at this body's formative processes. Laurie Stras, quoting Fisher (1999: 62), asserts that canonical blues singers "acquired that throaty roughness which is so frequent among blues singers, and which, though admired as characteristically African, is as a matter of fact nothing but a form of chronic laryngitis" (Stras 2006: 179).⁶⁰ We believe that a voice we hear confirms a difference based on race, but what we actually hear is, to recall Deborah Wong, the "somatic realization of race" (2000: 87).

Scenes from the vocal studio beg the following questions: What does it mean to discover one's "individual," "healthy," and "natural" voice? And what does Western demand for a "true" and "authentic" voice imply for people considered its margin? In order to investigate Ned Rorem's assertion stated in my opening epigraph, "[f]acts don't exist. The sole truth lies in a tone of voice," I would like to position his statement alongside an account by bell hooks:

When I became a student in college creative writing classes, I learned a notion of "voice" as embodying the distinctive expression of an individual

⁶⁰ The demands of a vocal style such as the blues, or the training of voices to sound in particular ways, are mistaken for the sounds of race. That is, we have come to confuse *style* with *inherent* sound necessitated by race. A study was conducted in which sample recordings of both popular and classical singing were played for a panel of voice teachers, including African-Americans. The entire group of listeners identified all of the singers in the musical samples as African-American in heritage—but none of them were. Richard Miller, in his concluding comment on this study, writes that "'Black' sound is culturally, not racially, generated (2005: 221)."

writer. Our efforts to become poets were to be realized in this coming into awareness and expression of one's voice. In all my writing classes, I was the only black student. Whenever I read a poem written in a particular dialect of southern black speech, the teacher and fellow students would praise me for using my "true," authentic voice, and encouraged me to develop this "voice," to write more of these poems. From the onset this troubled me. Such comments seemed to mask racial biases about what my authentic voice would or should be (1989: 11).

Slavoj Zizek offers a story about a reason for singing:

At the very beginning of his *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin presents the scene of women singing while picking strawberries on a field—with the acerbic explanation that they are ordered to sing by their mistress so that they cannot eat strawberries while picking them (Zizek 2002: 105).

The voice in Zizek's account is a site through which control over the body's will, desire and choice is carried out. Demanding constant singing to ensure that mouths are occupied is one chosen mode of management. Another tactic for monitoring and managing the body, evidenced by Rorem, is the iconization of the voice as the source of raw, unmediated truth. With that myth alive and kicking, young students will be repeatedly subjected to experiences such as hooks's. If the timbre of the voice is upheld as a medium through which truths about the identity of the singer are communicated directly, *sans* mediation, we must carefully examine the ideologies and perspectives through which the voice is heard.

To this end, this chapter has mapped the ways in which certain perspectives on the body and on the relative humanity of human beings have generated a logic within which classical vocal pedagogy seeks to allow the body it *sees* to resonate difference.

Chapter 2

The Construction of Acousmatic Blackness in American Opera

Setting the Stage

Scene One

“The Saints were supposed to be Spaniards,” a *Times* critic wrote about the composer’s casting choice for *Three Saints in Four Acts*, “but Virgil Thomson had chosen Harlem Negroes because of their diction. White singers, he feared, would act foolish and self-conscious chanting such lines as ‘Let Lucy Lily Lily Lucy Lucy Let Lucy (*Times* review. February 19).”

Scene Two

A great diva with a long career behind her was singing Tosca at the Met in 1961. Her dresser asked her whether she had yet heard Leontyne Price who has just made her unmatched debut as Leonora in *Il Trovatore*. As the story goes, the great diva, once a performer of the same role “quivered a few chins in lofty disapproval. ‘Ah, yes’, she purred. ‘Price. A lovely voice. But the poor thing is singing the wrong repertory!’ The dresser registered surprise. ‘What repertory,’ he asked, ‘should Price be singing?’ The great diva smiled a knowing smile. ‘Bess’, she purred. ‘Just Bess (Bernheimer 1985:755).”

Lights on...

Introduction

I now re-focus the lens from examination of one-to-one micro-corporeal disciplining of vocal timbre through vocal pedagogy to racialization of vocal timbre from a different perspective. I consider how a nation-wide Abolitionist sentiment gave ear to a particular reception of African-American classical vocality. In the past chapter I examined how classical European vocal pedagogy is grounded in knowledge that warranted colonialism; in this chapter I examine how the African-American voice in classical vocal practice in the United States has been framed by and thereby perceived aurally through historically rooted ideas of blackness.

This chapter is organized in two parts. In the first part, I trace the sonic idea of blackness in opera in the United States back to the trope of the spiritual. I also look at the influence of minstrel repertoire on the reception of classical repertoire through advance billing and associative perceptions of the performers therein. In the second part I argue that a particular idea of African-American classical vocality evolved to collectivize and conventionalize audience reception of blackness. I address and cite examples of the catalysts of a dynamic of racialized reception such as the casting of opera singers. Finally I consider the effect of isolating the African-American voice through *racialization of timbre* as a distinct border—one that starkly distinguishes the sonic idea of an African-American voice from the sonic idea of a white voice envisioned only as mute witness as opposed to *activator creating* the normative white voice of opera.

“Acousmatic Blackness”

The two “scenes” above from American opera illustrate the question I will discuss in the first part of this chapter: what are some of the origins of American opera culture’s engagement with tropes of romantic racialist discourse on black sound?

Mendi Obadike’s discussion of “acousmatic blackness” (2005: 138) is helpful in theorizing the ways in which the black voice is heard, perceived and constructed. In her discussion of the movie *Boiler Room* (2000), Obadike calls the presence of blackness represented only through sound and music the *acousmatic presence of blackness* (135-177). The *Boiler Room* is set in Wall Street, the characters being white, middle class stockbrokers. In the movie black men as stockbrokers are absent.⁶¹ Drawing mainly on hip-hop, the presentation of blackness solely through *sonic* references is what Obadike coins *acousmatic blackness*. Without inserting black bodies into the visual sphere, but by using music as the white characters’ *sonic skin*, Obadike argues that the notions of “poor black men as the standard of crass, ruthless, violent wastefulness” are integral plot aspects (138).

The black body is not physically present in the *Boiler Room*, but the marginality of the black body has come to represent through its sonic presence an active element of the movie’s narrative. In the same way, the presence of a black body in an African-American classical singer’s voice singing music historically associated with Europe manifests through the construction of pre-conceived notions of African-American vocal timbre. It is to the construction of that acousmatic blackness I now turn.

⁶¹ The irony, Obadike points out (2005: 137), is that the main character Chris Varick is played by Italian and Black Vin Diesel. However in the work environment in which the characters constantly delivers racial slurs to one another, Varick only receives comments about his Italian identity. Yet, no comments are heard about his black identity.

Early African-American Classical Opera Singers

Gaining fame in both the United States and Europe, Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield (1820s-1876) and Sissiretta Jones (1869-1933) were two of the first African-American singers to perform classical repertoire for large audiences. Both singers were invited to give high profile recitals such as Greenfield's command performance before the Queen of England⁶² in 1854 and Jones' performance before President Benjamin Harrison in 1892. Both singers also encountered segregation, often having to sing for an all-white audience, or with black audience members being relegated to separate balconies.

Born about 50 years apart, both Taylor-Greenfield and Jones were born with large and expansive voices that could handle multiple repertoires and genres. Contemporary reports also evidence the regularity with which both singers' performances were received and appreciated as minstrel shows. In effect, audiences tended to prefer a black person singing classical repertoire through reception patterns established by minstrel practices.

Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield

Known as the Black Swan,⁶³ Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield's⁶⁴ self-taught voice seems to have rivaled that of her contemporary, the world-renowned singer Jenny Lind,

⁶² Marie Selika Williams (ca. 1849-1937) was another African-American singer who sang before Queen Victoria during this time. See a short biography about Williams in Rosalyn Story (1993: 28-32).

⁶³ A discussion of the various derogatory names given to African-American performers is beyond the scope of this project. Taylor-Greenfield's nickname likely stems from that of contemporary performer Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale.

⁶⁴ Because no reputable voice teacher would risk a career to teach her, Greenfield was largely an autodidact. About fifty years later, Jones on the other hand had several teachers.

aka the Swedish Nightingale. Greenfield is reported to have matched the top range of her era's most famous singers. In 1852 a *Toronto Globe* writer rhapsodized not only about "the amazing power of [Greenfield's] voice, the flexibility and the ease of execution," but also reported that the "higher passages were given with clearness and fullness, indicating a soprano of great power. She can, in fact, go as low as Lablanche and as high as Jenny Lind, a power of voice perfectly astonishing...(quoted in Story 21)." Both Lind's celebrated three and a half octaves and the lower bass register were, according to this report, matched by Greenfield. However, the famed Italian bass Luigi Lablanche's voice reached the low E flat, while Greenfield's range extended from a low G in the bass clef to a high E above high C. Although many praised her "baritone" register, The *Toronto Globe* critic's praise was also indicative of the way in which she was received as an anomaly. A *New York Daily Tribute* critic wrote this about Greenfield's low register:

The idea of a woman's voice is a feminine tone; anything below that is disgusting. It is as bad as a bride with a beard on her chin and an oath in her mouth. We hear a great deal about woman's sphere. That sphere exists in music and it is the soprano region of the voice (quoted in Story 22).

We read that by defying the boundaries of the music monopolized by whites, Greenfield was also perceived (and castigated) as a gender deviation.

Reviews often applied additional racial epithets: A *Cincinnati Enquirer* critic referred to Greenfield as the "African Crow," while other critics scrutinized her ample figure. One estimated her weight to be between 275 and 300 points, adding that "her voice is more refined than her person," while a *Detroit Daily Advertiser* reported that the "Swan is [a] plain looking, medium sized, woolly headed, flat nose[d] negro woman, and

no one would suppose there was any more enchantment...in her than a side of leather (quoted in Story 23).” As evidenced by the weight guessing game, her physique was disproportionately emphasized by would-be music critics. Yet another report opined:

The Swan is of good figure and form, with a full bust, containing organs more completely adapted to the development of the vocal powers and qualities, than those of any other human being whose voice we ever listened to, or tested...her complexion not exactly ebony, but approaching it as nearly as the brownest black can possibly do; her features, but slightly modified from the pure African lineaments—retaining the low forehead, the depressed nose, and the expansive mouth, without the bulbous labia (quoted in Story 23).

Also the sight of the white usher accompanying Greenfield to the stage was so unusual for the audience that their reactions were more akin to a “carnival freak show (Story 21).” The *New York Herald* described one such escort who “seemed afraid to touch her with even the tips of his white kids, and kept the Swan at a respectable distance (quoted in Story 26).”

The audience fascination with the “Black Swan” bordered on unabashed disdain. A New York audience member wrote that Greenfield’s singing inspired the minstrel “wench” character Lucy Neel (Lott 1993: 235). In fact, amongst audiences there was not much of a distinction between the blackface performer of an Italian burlesque opera and an African-American singer performing classical repertoire.

Some critics were certainly aware of the larger context and implications of this silent distinction. An Ohio journalist wrote: “We know the natural prejudice that we all have against her color [...] and it is very difficult to divest one’s self entirely of them and criticize fairly and justly in such a case (quoted in Story 25).” In the same spirit, another critic reported that “Upon the suggestion of another [...] we listened to her without

looking toward her during the entire performance of ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ and were at once satisfactorily convinced that her voice is capable of producing sounds right sweet (25).” These two journalists unwittingly acknowledged that the historical narrative lens through which they listened connected the black body in the United States with the way in which they perceived sound.

Although Taylor-Greenfield was noted for her performances of Händel, Bellini and Donizetti, audiences in Europe and America were more enthralled by repertoire such as Steven Foster's *Old Folks at Home* and requested it frequently. A London performance is described by Harriet Beecher Stowe as follows:

Miss Greenfield’s turn for singing now came, and there was profound attention. Her voice, with its keen, searching fire, its penetrating vibrant quality, its “*timbre*,” as the French have it, cuts its way like a Damascus blade to the heart. It was the more touching from occasional rusticities and artistic defects, which showed that she had received no culture from art.

She sang the ballad, “Old folks at home,” giving one verse in the soprano, and another in the tenor voice (*Italics in original*. Quoted in Lott 1993: 235).

According to Stowe, an English lord remarked, in response to Jones’ performance, on the “use of these halls for the encouragement of an outcast race, a *consecration* [*italics in original?*].” Such audience reactions suggested to Stowe that “there really is no natural prejudice against colour in the human mind (both quoted in Lott 1993: 235).”

Thus Taylor-Greenfield performed to an audience and critics whose perception of her ranged from minstrel or bizarre in terms of her vocal abilities to testimony that humans are color blind.

Sissiretta Jones

Sissiretta Jones (1869-1933), with the stage name Black Patti,⁶⁵ enjoyed her career a few decades after Greenfield. Jones also sang a mixture of favorites from the operatic repertoire—arias from *Robert le Diable*, *L'Africaine*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata* and more—mixed with popular ballads such as *Home Sweet Home* and *Swanee River*. As with Greenfield, Jones' appearance was of great general interest. Rosalyn Story writes, "When Sissiretta Jones appeared before the public in the 1890s, everything about her was peculiarly alluring to her white observers—her hair, the tint of her skin, the shape of her head. Her physical attributes were described in the most embarrassing detail. To whites, she fell prey to the same magnifying scrutiny (Story 1993: 185)." A Canadian journalist observed:

Upon the platform, Madame Jones is very attractive. She has a perfect figure, a pretty natural carriage, and a pleasant, girlish face lit with dark, soft eyes. Her dress is the perfection of richness and good taste; a combination of form and color that give the dusky skin effective setting. Her hair, of heavy, dusky black, without ever a kink or curl, is coiled in a Grecian knot at the nape of the neck, showing a prettily shaped head. (quoted in Story 1993: 4).

"Her teeth," another journalist reports, "would be the envy of her fairer sisters and the despair of dentistry. Her rather thin lips are fond of exposing heir [sic] even row of teeth (quoted in Story 4)."

⁶⁵ This was a play on the name of the contemporary diva, the Italian soprano Adelina Patti. It of course implies that Sissiretta Jones was the poorer version, the black version of a singer. "No sooner had the real Adelina Patti departed," *The Berliner Zeitung* wrote, "than a most worthy substitute appeared in the person of Madame Sissiretta Jones, the 'Black Patti' (Story 1993: 12)." *The New York Clipper*, a theatrical journal, dubbed Jones the 'Black Patti' after her New York debut; her managers and others interested in her career promoted the name in an attempt to draw crowds. Jones herself disapproved of this label. She told the *Detroit Tribune*: "I don't think I can begin to sing as Patti can [...] and I have been anxious to drop the name. That is impossible almost, now it has become so identified with me (quoted in Story 8)."

Jones did concertize in the United States, and was one of the main attractions on a World's Fair tour to the West Indies. On her return from that tour, after problems with managers and difficulties being hired by opera companies, Jones finally returned to minstrelsy—where she had begun her musical career. In 1889 Jones had performed with the Georgia Minstrels at Dockstader's Theater in New York. Thus after her attempts at a career as a classical singer, once various promises about operatic contracts had fallen through, Jones turned to a different way of exhibiting her operatic voice. In 1896 she became the lead singer in Black Patti's Troubadours.⁶⁶ The show became very popular with Jones as the main attraction of the act, touring both nationally and internationally for several years.

The show was organized into three parts. One was billed as an "Operatic Kaleidoscope" wherein Jones, with a supporting orchestra, ensemble of singers and chorus, would perform scenes from operas including *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Il Trouvatore*, *La Bohème*, and *Rigoletto*. While it did feature materials from the operatic repertoire, the show ultimately conformed to the minstrel format and many artists solidified their reputation as minstrel performers and writers with the Black Patti Troubadours.⁶⁷

The Troubadours were often seen as more sophisticated than other touring minstrel shows. For example, the *Detroit Free Press* proclaimed: "These 'Troubadours' undoubtedly boast more black talent than any other like enterprise that ever was brought to public notice." The *Daily News* added: "Without exception the Black Patti Troubadours company is the best colored theatrical organization that has visited this city.

⁶⁶ The Black Patti Troubadours were produced by the New York theatrical proprietors Voelckel and Nolan.

⁶⁷ These include minstrel and vaudeville artists like Ernest Hogan, Williams and Walker (a comedy team), and composers Bob Cole and Billy Johnson.

Every member of it seems to be a star (both quotes from Story 1993: 16).” Jones, however, preferred to sing in concert or recital. “There are so many things in vaudeville performance to distract the attention of the audience,” she said, “that they are not in a proper frame of mind to enjoy straight singing (quoted in Story 16).”

Any black body in performance would necessarily perform in close proximity to blackface. And, as we’ve seen from the critics’ reports, given the unfamiliarity of African Americans singing classical repertoire, the reception of their performance was locked into the typical modes of reception for blackface performances. This reception pattern was also promoted by the fact that, as we have seen, the performed material was a mixture of classical repertoire, minstrel songs, and spirituals.

Sissiretta Jones was described in the *Chicago Tribune* as possessing a “peculiar, plaintive quality” that “no amount of training could eradicate. Not that anyone would want to have it eradicated. It is the heritage the singer has received from her race, and it alone tells not only of the sorrows of a single life, but the cruelly sad story of a whole people (quoted in Rosalyn Story 1993: 185).” This description mirrors the ways in which concert performers of the spiritual also were viewed. And, because minstrelsy was so much part of the public image of blacks in performance both classical and spiritual repertoire was folded into minstrel reception patterns.

Spirituals

The Fisk Jubilee Singers, founded in 1871, were among the first to bring the spiritual to a formalized concert setting. In this endeavor they encountered problematic

audience reactions to the image of the black body on stage. When they recontextualized spirituals, or “sorrow songs,” for an art music setting, listeners were taken aback.

As classical African-American singers mixed art song repertoire with minstrel songs and spirituals, the Fisk Jubilee Singers featured both spirituals and minstrel songs on their programs. However, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were associated with minstrelsy not merely because of the presence of minstrel repertoire, but—more significantly—because of the presence of the black performing body. In *Love and theft: blackface minstrelsy and the American* (1993), a work which considers minstrelsy in America in the decades before the Civil War,⁶⁸ Eric Lott writes that the Fisk Singers were often mistaken for a minstrel troupe, and therefore added Jubilee to their name to avoid this confusion. Not long after the advent of the Singers’ public performances, both black and white minstrel groups began to advertise themselves as “jubilee” singing groups mixing minstrel songs with spirituals.

This sea change took place after audiences had become comfortable with the codes of consumption around minstrel shows, in some places, for over forty years. It would not, therefore, involve an improbably large leap to reason that when these former minstrel groups simply added spirituals to their repertoire and changed their rubric to “jubilee” singers, a strong connection was assumed between the minstrel and the spiritual repertoire. When a body (white or black) had been infused with the minstrel performance style and repertoire, audiences viewed this performer in certain ways. It is not unlikely that when that same performer added the spiritual (or classical repertoire, as did Elizabeth

⁶⁸ Minstrel performance is commonly thought to have taken place between (1830s-1950s). However, white performers from Elvis to contemporary hip-hop stars might be seen as modulations of blackface minstrel acts. In fact, Eric Lott has written, “Every time you hear an expansive white man drop into his version of black English, you are in the presence of blackface’s unconscious return (1993: 5).”

Greenfield) to his or her repertoire, the audience would view that performer from the same perspective and with the same set of preconceived notions attached to the minstrel show.

As a consequence, when considering the nationwide public reception of the spiritual we must take into account the ways in which its reception was inseparable from reception patterns already established by minstrel performance. The first nationally known African-American singer also mixed classical repertoire with minstrel songs, framed within a minstrel show format. And, as we have seen, the reception of African-American classical singers has been intimately tied to the reception of the spiritual. In the repertoire of performers such as Elizabeth Taylor-Greenfield these three repertoires are presented side by side. An intimate connection thus becomes apparent between the reception of an African-American classical singer and the long reception history of not only the spiritual, but also the minstrel repertoire.

Hence, by bringing the spiritual to the formal concert stage, the Fisk Jubilee Singers solidified the connection between the singing of the spiritual and African-Americans singing classical repertoire. Toni Anderson has elaborated on the ambivalence in white reporting on issues of high art and the Fisk Jubilee singers. Anderson notes that a discussion of the capability of the Jubilee singers to produce “high art” was ongoing among critics. One critic wrote that the troupe’s rendition of “Home, Sweet Home” had never been “more exquisitely rendered.” This praise was, however, quickly qualified with this statement: “We do not mean, of course, in a modern ‘artistic’ sense, but we do say that no rendition we ever heard went deeper into the heart of the audience, or more perfectly conveyed the sentiment of the lines.” Another wrote, “While the singing did not

of course evince what is called high art and the music was simple, it was melodious, was sung in good taste, and evinced rare musical capacity (quoted in Anderson 1997: 98).⁶⁹

Ronald Radano (2003) notes that these performances “enacted a radical hybrid of songs invented in the isolation of slavery and of artistic practices based in the common domain of the concert hall (259).” Through the introduction of a large repertory of slave melodies reworked for concert choir, this radically new kind of American music was broadly disseminated. And by simultaneously challenging conventions of European choral practice and upsetting the standards of European art music, the Fisk performances carried out a curious contradiction. Radano concludes that by adopting the performance practices of the concert stage, a “racial sense of place” which pleased white audiences was affirmed (259).

As an embodiment of Negro authenticity, the Jubilee groups’ performance style was a significant challenge to ongoing efforts to contain racial categories. Radano remarks that the spiritual, which many blacks perhaps regarded, in the words of an unknown Fisk performer, “as signs of their former disgrace[,]...prison clothes of the days of [the slaves’] incarceration,”⁷⁰ had received a new authority, which in some cases rivaled the appraisal of European arts, through the Fisk performances. The Fisk performer noted that these musicians were astonished at the way their music was received: “We did not realize how precious they would be held by those who had prayed for us, and with us till we were delivered from slavery, and how these were the genuine jewels we brought from our bondage (both quotes in Radano 2003: 259).”

⁶⁹ “Fisk Jubilee Singers.” *Folio* 8, no. 5 (May 1873): 134.

⁷⁰ Note from Anderson (1997: 87).

There are commonalities between the first reviews of the “Negros” presenting spirituals as concert music and reviews of African-Americans singing classical repertoire. While there is praise for both, each is explained as a natural “endowment” rather than hard-earned skill. In a concert review of the Fisk Jubilee singers, an anonymous *New York Journal* reporter remarks: “They are all natural musicians, and doubtless have sung from childhood, like mocking birds because they could not help it (Radano 259).” An 1873 article about the Jubilee singers expresses a similar sentiment:

The first thing that strikes us in the singing of the Jubilee Singers is its intense earnestness. The subject of their songs is to them a reality, something they have themselves realized and not a mere sentiment or imagination: they feel the words, and therefore they sing the music...The music is not confined to the usual major or minor forms, as stereotyped in modern music; but it is constructed in such modes as are naturally used by the human voice in speaking, as well as in singing...The character of the music is purely natural as contradistinguished from artistic—hence one great cause of its popular power...The richness and purity of tone, both in melody and harmony, the contrast of light and shade, the varieties of gentleness and grandeur in expression, and the exquisite refinement of the piano, as contrasted with the power of the forte, fill us with delight, and at the same time, make us feel how strange it is that these unpretending singers should come over here to teach us what is the true refinement of music, and make us feel its moral and religion [*sic*] power (quoted in Radano 2003: 260).⁷¹

The troubled veneration conveyed in this passage expresses a general unease about slave songs in their definition against other arts at the time. “If the ‘wild harmonies of a band of gentle savages from Tennessee’⁷² were gaining widespread admiration,” Radano asks, “what could be left of the aesthetic achievements of a putatively superior white race (page)?” If not entirely solved, the dilemma is at least addressed through

⁷¹ “The Jubilee Singers,” *Dwights Journal of Music* 33, no. 17 (November 29, 1873).

⁷² Quoted in Anderson (1997: 99). Originally appeared in *Newark Evening Courier* (ca. January 1872), found in the Fisk scrapbook, Special Collections, Fisk University.

transposition of the power of the song as “intense earnestness” and “purity and richness of tone” emanating from the singers’ “reality.” This is therefore not an art available to whites.

Ethnosympathy

In 1845 Frederick Douglass, emancipated slave, author of the first well-known autobiography of an ex-slave, and one of the foremost leaders of the abolitionist movement, asked his readers to pause and listen to the songs of the slaves. In their “songs of sorrow” we would hear their “tales of woe,” for “every tone was a testimony against slavery (quoted in Cruz 1999: 3).” Douglass’s audience did listen to him, and by the end of the Civil War voices and melodies once considered noise were now heard as song, and used by abolitionists as symbolic weapons against slavery. Sociologist Jon Cruz has described this as a “new mode of hearing,” only possible if one assumed that slaves possessed an inner world (Cruz 1). Cruz terms this mode of reception *ethnosympathy*-- that is, a humanitarian pursuit of classifiable subjects. The spiritual was recognized as a clear cultural form – the black form preferred by “white moral and cultural entrepreneurs (4).” In Cruz’s words, “cultural authenticity was the key to subject authenticity (7).” To be able to hear the cries to God embedded in spirituals was the sign of a mature cultural interpreter, and a reader of what until then had been the secrets of slaves (Cruz 119). This new ethnosympathy through which slaves’ voices were heard allowed seekers to discover an “underlying authenticity of subjects through their cultural practices.” “Cultural authenticity,” in the words of Cruz, “was the key to subject authenticity (Cruz 7).” In

other words, the narratives of Douglass and other freed slaves “opened up the *interior* sensibility of slaves to cultural analysis (Cruz 105).”

The discovery of and interest in slaves’ song making was unprecedented. With this break from previous frameworks in which the sound of black song was considered alien noise, a critical humanistic interest in the music of African Americans was inspired. Slaves were still objects of property, but the combination of “proselytization” and whites’ hearing of slaves singing religious songs, Cruz writes, gradually “granted [slaves] a new subjectivity (Cruz 4).” It also functioned as a vehicle for sympathetic whites, particularly abolitionists, to further their imagination of slaves as culturally expressive subjects.

Therefore, when black and white intellectuals adopted a notion of a new sense of black subjectivity, a connection between “humanitarian reformist redemption politics of abolitionism and a quest for cultural authenticity” was firmly entrenched (Cruz 6). This connection was forged between the spiritual repertoire and classical music not only in song, but in presentation as well. The spiritual connection was edified through the enabling of the white person to imagine the slave and the black person as a human being. Changing perceptions of the spiritual and the change in the sound of the voice of the slave from noise to lament constitute social processes embedded as cultural form.

The persistent “recognition” of the sound of the spiritual in black classical singers’ voices, I suggest, is coupled with a lingering ethnosympathy. The limited subjectivity offered to slaves through their reconceptualization as “culturally expressive subjects” (Cruz 4) is thus maintained – but the subject will only be recognized as long as s/he stays essentially black. In the process of racializing vocal timbre, the spiritual has served as a vehicle to distinguish between the sounds that can supposedly arise from

black and white bodies. Therefore, African-American classical singers are recognized when they fit into categories occupied by unequivocal black bodies paired with unambiguous vocal timbres – that is, voices which perform a particular type of blackness. In the second half of this chapter we will see that the African-American opera singer's voice and subjectivity is intimately tied to, and heard through, the spiritual—the vocal style that through signifying difference granted slaves limited subjectivity.

The sonic presence of blackness in the operatic voice—acousmatic blackness—has been shaped through various historical and cultural turns: 1) White audiences perceived the black body in performance as enslaved and subhuman, and through distorted, derogatory images brought to life by, among other cultural-social forces, minstrel performances; 2) because the first African-American classical performers were perceived through this imagery it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to give a recital without also performing repertoire, such as minstrelsy, which the audience expected and demanded; 3) The Fisk Jubilee singers' introduction of spiritual repertoire to the formal concert stage represents an important change in the reception of both African-American repertoire and performance. However, the changing reception of concert performance of spirituals was influenced by the status—human subjectivity through cultural authenticity—already bestowed upon the black person singing the spiritual.

It is this complex web of interracial “performances” that is developed in chapters 6 and 7 by singers, producers and listeners within which the first major nationally and internationally known African-American classical singer Marion Anderson forged a career. I will suggest that Anderson's career highs were significantly shaped by

the complex history outlined in the first part of this chapter. I will also suggest that the particular trajectory through which her voice and career were solidified was a trajectory that African-American classical singers continue to follow. Throughout Anderson's career the presence of acousmatic blackness through vocal timbre (shaped and imagined through the complex history we have discussed) was conceptualized by those who heard her sing. It is to that story, and to the tale of how acousmatic blackness has subsequently been dealt with in American opera, that I now turn, considering the racialization of the voice in performance, and exploring in detail the relationships between performance, body and race in opera.

"Acousmatic Blackness" in Opera

On January 7th, 1955 the Metropolitan Opera stage curtains revealed Marian Anderson (1897-1993) as the sorceress Ulricha in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* (1859). The magnitude of the event was such that she couldn't help but be affected. Anderson recalls:

'The curtain rose [...] and I was there on the stage, mixing the witch's brew. I trembled, and when the audience applauded and applauded before I could sing a note I felt myself tightening into a knot. [...] I was as nervous as a kitten. [...] and there were things that happened to my voice that should not have happened. [...] my emotions were too strong (qtd. in Burroughs 2004: 61).

The Metropolitan stage had been white for its seventy-two years of existence and most people felt that despite her brief tenure (only eight performances over two seasons) Anderson's hiring was an important event in the struggle for desegregation in the world

of classical music. As a *New York Times* reporter noted, it would “open doors” for “other negro singers (*The New York Times*, October 17, 1954).”

An earlier landmark in Anderson’s career, the 1939 Easter morning concert for 75,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial, was an event that became pivotal in creating wide-ranging support and sympathy for the civil rights movement. Because of her color Anderson had been refused an appearance at Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Eleanor Roosevelt immediately resigned from the DAR and with members of NAACP organized the concert at the Lincoln Memorial. Allan Keiler (2000) writes in his biography of Anderson that she herself had not intended that her artistic career be used to promote a cause. And if through being the first African-American to appear on the Metropolitan stage and being at the center of the event that led to the Lincoln Memorial concert she happened to become an icon for the civil rights movement, it was against her own intention.

Thus, Anderson, the first major African-American classical singer, the singer who would “open doors” for other African-American singers, was a reluctant and unwitting activist. She was not only framed by the particular historical circumstances of African-Americans in the United States, but also in London by voice teacher Louis Drysdale, who had trained directly with Gustave Garcia, the third-generation scion of the famous Garcia family of vocal pedagogues who had schooled Anderson in the art of *bel canto*. Notably, Gustave Garcia is the son of Manuel Garcia II, discussed in the previous chapter as the father of modern vocal pedagogy. Thus Anderson was taught by a Eurocentric vocal pedagogue and conditioned by teachers and audiences in the United States.

Despite Anderson's training with some of the foremost European vocal pedagogues, critics in London were far from impressed.⁷³ Although Anderson's "warm and rich tone" is mentioned by one reporter, others noticed a certain "naive appeal in her readings that compensated for occasional lack of subtlety (quoted in Keiler 2000: 79)."⁷⁴ One wrote, "her voice has the peculiar timbre common to colored vocalists," while another opined more harshly that "the 'scoop' is evidently a racial fault, for it fell into place as the natural thing in some Negro spirituals (quoted in Keiler 80)."⁷⁵ The journalists questioned her delivery of classical repertoire, while noting that what they found to be vocal flaws when performing classical repertoire seemed to suit her realization of spirituals. London critics were typical in connecting the African-American voice and the spiritual. These were claims that basically amounted to assertions that, as the term went, 'negroes' were born to sing the spiritual. Their singing of different material was often severely questioned, and a critique which described the "lacks" in the African-American voice often concluded with the opinion that that voice, although a good voice, was best suited for singing spirituals.

The narrative of the connection between the so-called African-American vocal timbre and the spiritual that surrounded Anderson's voice is one that follows African-American singers with a career in classical music. The tone of the following report by Vincent Sheean is not unusual:

⁷³ The granddaughter of a freed slave, Anderson's vocal talent was first recognized in her father's local Union Baptist Church in Philadelphia. The church community provided her musical education, first through choirs and then by sponsoring private voice lessons after she was refused entry into the local, segregated, music school. After a disappointing debut in the New York City Town Hall, where her German and Italian diction were severely criticized, Anderson was about to give up the idea of a singing career, but was convinced to continue her studies in London.

⁷⁴ *London Times*, June 16, 1928.

⁷⁵ *London Times*, June 16, 1928.

In the last group she sang a spiritual, “They crucified my Lord, and he never said a mumblin’ word.” Hardly anybody in the audience understood English well enough to follow what she was saying, and yet the immense sorrow—something more than the sorrow of a single person—that weighted her tones and lay over her dusky, angular face was enough. At the end of this spiritual there was no applause at all—a silence instinctive, natural and intense, so that you were afraid to breathe. What Anderson had done was something outside the limits of classical or romantic music: she frightened us with the conception, in musical terms of course, but outside the normal limits, of a mighty suffering (quoted in Story 1993: 46).

Sheean wrote of the sorrow Anderson communicated through her body language while singing—and he described a concept of music and a range of human emotions that transcended classical music.

In examining successful African-American classical singers, we may observe a constant narrative of the spiritual as the most important factor in shaping a distinctive vocal sound. Whether it is embraced or denied, the spiritual is present. Which available role is the African-American voice in classical music asked to fill, and what does the connection to the spiritual accomplish in this regard?

Two streams of acousmatic blackness flow through Anderson’s voice. Her identity as a classical singer was shaped not only indirectly, through modern classical pedagogy’s connection to colonial attitudes about the body and voice of the Other, but also directly, in her training by a disciple of Garcia II. And public perception of her voice was shaped by American ideas about the African-American body and voice, especially in regards to the spiritual and to authenticity of expression.

The emergence of the concept of an African-American vocal timbre presumes a *white* voice to be the normative and unmarked sound of opera. Within this context how

are the voices of African Americans with their acousmatic blackness cast in American opera?

After Anderson's debut at the Metropolitan Opera there was a period in which African-Americans gained a relatively large number of operatic roles. Divas like Dorothy Maynor, Leontyne Price, Martina Arroyo, Grace Bumpury, and Shirley Verrett sung on both American and European stages. However much they were perceived as divas, though (as illustrated by the following story about Leontyne Price), the presence of a perceived or performed acousmatic blackness followed, as a fact would accompany a white singer. Rather than use adjectives commonly invoked to describe the voice of an African-American singer—for example, as described by conductor Richard Bobynge, “smoky, emotional-sounding (quoted in Story 186)” or as another reviewer described it, “Price...brought back uninhibited splendour. Price's voice has an unmistakably individual fragrance—husky, musky, smoky, misty⁷⁶ (on a bad day foggy!)—and palpitating pagan sexiness. It is not the voice of a good girl (quoted in Bernheimer 1985: 759-760)—Price describes her own voice as “juicy lyric.” A true diva, she shares her own feelings about her voice: “It's terrible,” she replied to one interviewer, “but, you know, I just love the sound of my own voice. Sometimes I simply move myself to tears. I suppose I must be my own best fan, I don't care if that sounds immodest.” Price, whose career was “simultaneous with the opening up of civil rights,” ultimately lamented, “Whenever there was any copy about me, what I as an artist, what I had as ability, got

⁷⁶ I wrote about the visual descriptive language of voices of African-American singers in my qualification exam (2004). A contemporary example is available in the English language wikipedia entry for Grace Bumpury, popularly known as “Black Venus:” “[Grace] Bumpury's voice was rich and sizable, possessing a wide range, and was capable of producing *a plangent, bronze-hued, very distinctive tone* (my italics) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Bumpury. Accessed November 1, 2007).”

shoveled under because all the attention was on racial connotations (quoted in Bernheimer 760).” How were African-American opera singers cast when they were considered in terms of their color and acousmatic blackness first and vocal abilities second?

Racialized Casting

With her 1946 debut at the New York City Opera, Camilla Williams was the first female African American to receive a contract with a major American opera company. Williams was hired to sing the title role in *Madame Butterfly*. One year earlier, Robert (Todd) Duncan became the first African-American member of the New York City Opera, signed as the hunchback actor Tonio in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*. However, it is probably Marian Anderson's 1955 Metropolitan Opera debut as the sorceress Ulrica—an ‘old-gypsy’ role—in *La Forza del Destino* that stands out for most people as the epochal moment for African-Americans in opera. Leontyne Price, who might be considered the first full-blown African-American diva, debuted in the role of St. Cecilia in the premier of Virgil Thompson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*. She then went on to sing the role of Bess. However, her versions of Aida and Cleopatra⁷⁷ are the interpretations with which her audience came to identify her most strongly.

The term *typecasting* refers to an actor's strong association with a character he or she has played, or a certain type of character, or the idea that his or her personal appearance and demeanor lends itself to a particular type of role. Rosalyn Story refers to

⁷⁷ Samuel Barber wrote this role for her.

the “maid/slave-girl/gypsy syndrome” as a form of racialized “typecasting (1993: 184).” The black body in opera has been so consistently associated with a particular type of role that this association amounts to typecasting. For instance, critic Bernard H. Haggin, in his collections of essays entitled *Music and Ballet 1973-1983*, recounts a 1974 performance of *Don Giovanni* at the Met: “...Price’s superb singing as Donna Anna up to the concluding florid last [sic] passages of “Non mi dir”, which she managed in a sort of vocal short-hand that implied the notes she didn’t sing.” Haggin continues: “Price presented with her Donna Anna the same obtrusive incongruity as previously with her Leonora in *Il Trovatore* and her Pamina in the *Magic Flute* but not with her Aida. When I look at what is happening on stage my imagination still cannot accommodate itself to a black in the role of a white.” A second epigraph imagines Leontyne Price to be appropriate only for the role of Bess, While we know that realism in terms of age and body size is routinely violated in opera, Haggin evinces attitudes that beg a so-called *realistic hue* of skin casting.

One of the most celebrated African-American baritones, Simon Estes, although he has sung at the major opera houses, has had difficulty throughout his career with racialized casting. At Bayreuth⁷⁸ Estes sung the title role of the Flying Dutchman with great success, as well as Amfortas in *Parsifal*. However, when Sir Georg Solti and Sir Peter Hall assembled their new *Ring*, Estes’ audition for the role of Wotan was rejected. Stephen Fay writes in his Bayreuth chronicle *The Ring: Anatomy of an Opera*, that Hall “might indeed have been troubled by the idea of a black Wotan surrounded by a large

⁷⁸ Richard Wagner built the opera house in Bayreuth as a place where his music would be performed. The place has come to represent—after Hitler’s love of Wagner’s music and for this particular opera house—love for and dedication to the “Aryan race.”

family of white singers...” Fay continues, “he did not object in principle to a black Wotan as long as there were black singers among his daughters, but he felt that Estes’ audition had not made it necessary for him to make such a choice (quoted in Bernheimer 757).” Estes, according to a British journalist, “claimed publicly that he did not get the part because he was black, despite regular denials by Hall and Solti who insisted that they had found the voice insufficiently pleasing (quoted in Bernheimer 1985: 757).”⁷⁹

One singer tells of being turned down for the role of Desmonda in *Otello* because she was black. For a Glyndebourne Festival production of *Don Giovanni*, director Sir Peter Hall ignored suggestions to hire Leonora Mitchell for the role of the Spanish aristocrat Donna Anna; her presence, he said, would “ruin the realism and social structure which were to form the very heart of the production.” Mitchell responded in an *Opera News* article: “You’d think people wouldn’t even consider all that any more. They just shouldn’t be saying that somebody doesn’t look at the part when certain singers are 350 pounds fat. Now are they gonna play a nice young Donna Anna?” Cynthia Clarey was turned down for a role when a director claimed he wanted to do an “authentic” production of a particular opera. “If the director feels that way, fine,” said Clarey, “I don’t like it—it’s a job that I could have had. But if he really feels that way, I think I’d be a lot happier not doing it.” Such subtler forms of discrimination are difficult to pinpoint. “Opera is such a subjective art,” Mitchell said, “they can always hide behind words like ‘She’s just not my type’ (Story 1993: 189).”

Racialized casting was endemic even before African-American singers ascended the opera stage. About Sissiretta Jones, for instance, a journalist in the *Philadelphia*

⁷⁹ Estes later sang Wotan in Berlin to favorable critiques.

Times wrote (in a review of a performance at the Academy): “The thought was irresistible that she would make a superb Aida, whom her appearance, as well as her voice, suggested (quoted in Story 14).” Jones is reported to have said that she would very much have liked to sing in one of her favorite operas, *L’Africaine* by Giacomo Meyerbeer, but on reflection she shared: “They tell me my color is against me (Story 14).” Jones was also reported to have considered an offer from Pietro Mascagni to be featured in his *Scipio Africanus*. Rosalyn Story writes that it would have been unrealistic to expect that Mascagni could garner financial support from whites if Jones was playing the lead, with white singers as her subordinates (14). Finally in 1892 the Metropolitan opera engaged her to sing Selika in *L’Africaine*, as well as Aida, but these performances were cancelled when the house burnt down

Not only has the African-American singer been cast in the role of the Other within a larger work, entire works have been conceived as having been written for African-American performers.

Seeking All-Black Casting

Premiered in 1934, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Virgil Thomson’s opera with libretto by Gertrude Stein, has been described by Lisa Barg as rehearsing “romantic racialist discourse on black sound (2000: 123).” One example is Thomson’s all-black cast. For this choice there are a few explanations in circulation. Carl Van Vechten, in the introduction to the published libretto, quoted Thomson on tone quality: “[Negro singers] alone possess the dignity and the poise, the lack of self-consciousness that proper

interpretation of the opera demands. They have the rich, resonant voices essential to the singing of my music and the clear enunciation required to deliver Gertrude's text (quoted in Barg 123)." Thomson also related that his casting idea came to him after listening to "[Jimmie] Daniel's rendition of popular Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler tune, 'I've Got the World on a String,' delivered with the singer's signature "breezy rhythmic swing and free-and-easy vocalism"⁸⁰ (Barg 139)." Thomson was attracted to what he viewed as the "racial qualities" of Daniel's voice. Yet another story relays that Thomson first conceived of an all-black cast while attending Hall Johnson's *Run Little Chittlun!* Whatever the actual origin of the idea, all these tales convey a fascination with the black voice and body, and recognition of and pleasure in the "grain" of the black voice. This recognition and pleasure is expressed in patronizingly loud praise that, in the words of Barg, masks a "deeper racial logic, one with considerable historical precedence in cultural commentary about black singing (Barg 151)." This racial logic is also evident in the public discourse around *Four Saints in Three Acts*.

After opining that the imperative for the conceptual strength of opera consisted in a resistance to traditional "reason and logic," one critic observed that it "is doubtful if white singers could have given the core, with its strange alternation of comedy and exaltations, the flavor it requires."⁸¹ Another review found that "the players from Harlem...speak their lines without spoofing them, and lend a *poignant dignity* to even some of the most absurd moments of the text (Barg's emphasis. Quoted in Barg 133)." Thomson concluded "Negros gave meaning to both words and music by making the Stein

⁸⁰ Lisa Barg also suggests that Thomson most likely was enchanted not only by the racial quality of Daniel's voice, but also by his queer performance.

⁸¹ New York Times, Feb. 9, 1934.

text easy to accept (Thomson 1966: 239).” Yet another critic reported, “It was at least demonstrated that music, motion, color...do in themselves offer a fabric of enjoyment and even illusion, though utterly unsupported by conventional opera props of plot, lucid speech, and hectic action. It is doubtful whether this opera could have made its point with equal sincerity in the hands of other players than Negroes. Their imaginative powers, beauty of motion, and appealing voices afforded delightfully pliant material (Kyes 1934: 21).” These comments, Barg writes, imply that performers’ voices and bodies perform as simply an abstract screen. This screen is, however, physically charged, a “delightfully pliant material” that expresses “elemental essences of (skin) color, line, movement, and voice’ directly (Barg 134).”

Four Saints in Three Acts was received very positively: “...the work as a whole exerted a certain individual appeal which probably could not be found except in actual performance, with the primary colors of the sets, the whole hearted, unsophisticated absorption and expressive talent of the Negro cast...Mr. Thomson’s idea of employing an all-Negro cast proved to be a final and indispensable feature in the effectiveness of the work, which is indeed an opera, but quite unlike any opera ever presented at the Metropolitan. With a white cast, one might have thought more about the apparent lack of direct meaning in Miss Stein’s sentences (quoted in Barg 134).” Writing for *American Mercury*, W.J. Henderson agreed that the “spell” of the production was “to be found in the natural talent of Negroes for playing seriously like a lot of children.” The cast, he wrote, “knelt and rolled their eyes toward stage heaven, genuflected, saint before saint with the deepest gravity, and sang their nonsense syllables with as much faith and devotion as they might have sung, ‘It’s me, Lord, standin’ in the need of prayer.” And, he

added, “[Ma]ybe it was meant to be a burlesque on ‘grand opera.’ If so, it is a gorgeous success (quoted in Barg 134).”

In fact, many of the audience members for *Four Saints* also flocked to the Cotton Club for transgressive pleasure. The associations between *Four Saints* and the Cotton Club were picked up by a *Time* magazine critic: “The Negroes...were natural and earnest. A handsome buck in evening clothes, and a girl who might have been a Cotton Club entertainer, acted as end men, called out the scenes and acts (quoted in Barg 135).”

Barg has noted that the dress of the “end men,” the host and hostess of the opera who observed and prompted the onstage action from a side box, evidenced a striking similarity to the host and hostess at the Cotton Club. The perception that the text played with racialized speech was picked up by commentators, as when a contemporary humorist parodied the opera, writing a (blackface) parody of a spiritual: “Nobody knows the opera I seen; nobody knows but Gertrude (quoted in Barg 148).”

And not only for its creators, but also for urban white audiences anno 1934, the opera’s “leap into the irrational world (described by John Cage in an essay about *Four Saints*),” and its inexplicable fusion of “mirth and metaphysics,” could only be mediated through precoded perceptions of African-American performers (Hoover and Cage 1959: 157). For example, Thomson’s nonsense use of the name Lucy in the second epigraph carried references to two specific minstrel songs, one of which featured the *ur*-wench of minstrelsy, Lucy. At least two of the most popular songs during the antebellum period minstrel repertoire referred to this stock character. “Miss Lucy Long” was a love song with a twist of humor, while “Miss Lucy Neal” was a sentimental “plantation song” with a tragic ending. Italian opera played in blackface burlesque was also commonly featured

as a section of minstrel shows. This genre allowed for the parodying of high culture and pretentiousness under the cover of blackness. Lawrence Levine and others have observed that these burlesques were a part of the “Americanization” of opera (Levine 1990: 92).

Over and over we observe the free uses of the conceived modules of blackness as imagined in voice and body, minstrelsy, the spiritual and authentic negro, and the parodying of black language and pronunciation in the production of and the discourse surrounding *Four Saints in Three Acts*.

Porgy and Bess (1935), premiering one year after *Four Saints in Three Acts*, had a similar stipulation regarding the cast. George Gershwin’s folk opera in three acts (with a libretto by Du Bose Heyward and with lyrics by Heyward and Ira Gershwin) has been a mixed blessing for African-American singers. “Thank God, I never had to sing Bess,” mezzo-soprano and director of the Harlem School of the Arts Betty Allen says. “I never had to sing Aida soprano. But I was really against the typical casting that had nothing to do with your voice, or your type, but just to do with your dark skin. What’s that? (interview in *Aida’s Brother and Sister*).” Her sigh not only represents relief at avoiding what some African-American singers call the “Porgy and Bess curse (see Jason Oby 1989),” but also points to the more general issue of racialized casting in opera. In 1985 the Metropolitan Opera put on a 50th anniversary production of *Porgy and Bess* and the employment rate of African American singers rose to 25%. This is in comparison to a rate of only 2% in the 1970-71 opera season. In 1989, when there was no production of *Porgy and Bess*, the employment rate dropped to 14% counting choir members (Story 183-184). Gershwin stipulated that only African-American singers are to be cast in his opera, and his estate still maintains this policy. The Gershwin estate, the Met explains,

insists on an all-black cast and chorus. The Estate, however, did not object to an all-German cast in ‘black face’ singing a translated libretto in German. “Bess, nun bist Du meine Frau,” Porgy declares. Edward Said, in an interview about *Porgy and Bess*, stated, “It is so condescending. These are not real characters. These are folklore characters, harmless in some ways, distant. The cliché used to have it –a natural sense of rhythm. They eat watermelon. I mean, all the clichés that go back to Al Jolson (Interview in *Aida’s Brother and Sister*).”⁸² Therefore, while operas such as *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *Porgy and Bess* have been important for many African-American singers both in launching their careers and in getting continuing work, this same work in roles written specifically for African-American performers is also a double-edged sword in the effort to integrate American opera.

Tone of Voice

African-American singers who have performed on an integrated stage describe mixed experiences. Cynthia Clarey made her debut with the Deutscher Oper, Berlin, as Nicklaussen in *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*. Most critiques praised her stage presence, technique, style, and range, but Dr Geerd Heinsen, editor of the magazine *Orpheus*, found her “tone quality too Negroid for the French vocal line.” He qualified this statement, however, adding “but that is a matter of taste (quoted in Bernheimer 1985: 758).”

⁸² However, Bobby McFerrin, singer, composer, conductor and son of Robert McFerrin, the first African-American male to sing at the Metropolitan Opera, believes that Gershwin should be applauded for his *attempt* at creating an African American story (in *Aida’s Brother and Sister*).

In *The Singing Voice* ([1971] 1984), Robert Rushmore writes about the African-American voice: “I think today that if he did not know, a perceptive listener would instantly recognize the voice of Leontyne Price as belonging to a black. But this is beginning to change presumably as blacks become more assimilated into America (quoted in Bernheimer 1985: 760)”⁸³ Rushmore refers to Ida Franca’s *Manual of Bel Canto* (1953): “Frequently the range of a Negro singer...can be developed to outdo any white singer’s range.” She also writes that the *tenorino*, or counter-tenor voice is peculiar to the black, adding “with appropriate training such a voice can, of course, be developed into a voice of no less power and charm than the voice of a castrated virtuoso (quoted in Bernheimer 1985: 759).” Rushmore adds: “I do not know whether today’s super pop singer Michael Jackson has had any ‘appropriate training.’ But certainly the tones that he produces could be identified as proceeding from ‘a castrated virtuoso’ (quoted in Bernheimer 759).”

Whether the origin of a particular black voice is being traced to the structure of the body, authenticity through the spiritual, or belief in a separate experience of African-American life apart from normative American life, the evidence of the black body—*acousmatic blackness*—is believed to be found in the vocal timbre.

Two well-known African-American opera singers, Simon Estes and Barbara Hendrix, have addressed the importance of religion and the spiritual to their growth as

⁸³ “When I first heard Marilyn Horne sing,” Shirley Verrett shared in an interview, “she was auditioning for a conductor at the Hollywood Bowl at the same time I was there. I didn’t know her, and I thought it was a black singer singing. When I found out it was a white person I said, ‘Hmmm, there goes that.’ But that doesn’t happen very often, I do admit. It’s very rare when I would mistake a white singer for a black singer, but I have mistaken black singers for white singers many times, especially the lighter voices. When you get down to the mezzo voices, the dramatic soprano voices, somehow the weight of the voice gives it away (Story 187).”

classical singers. Hendrix attributes her ability to express suffering in a Mozart aria through her previous experience singing the spiritual. Yet, the first African-American Met coach (hired in 1950), Sylvia Lee, said about African-American soprano Martina Arroyo's attempt at singing spirituals that she'd never heard such white spirituals all her life (interview in *Aida's Brother and Sister*). Lee subsequently coached Arroyo in singing the spiritual in exactly the same manner as she would coach the diction and phrasing of German lieder. While some singers, like Estes and Hendrix, acknowledge that singing the spiritual was an important stage in their artistic development. However others, such as Arroyo, never sang the spiritual and were, in fact, "illiterate" in the idiom and had to learn it like any other vocal style she learned as part of her repertoire as a professional singer. There is, nonetheless, a constant narrative about one particular vocal timbre of the African-American operatic voice, traced back to the spiritual. Needless to say, this is problematic when the "black sound" is traced back to the influence of the spiritual also in singers such as Arroyo who mimics, rather than is shaped by this vocal idiom.

By connecting the spiritual with the African-American classical vocal sound, there is a noteworthy creation of a seemingly coherent black vocal timbre. The black, racialized body is inserted into the voice of the African-American singer, whose instrument thus is trapped by sonically limited historical racial categories. By lumping together particular racialized bodies and vocal timbral qualities categories are engendered and cultivated. What has acousmatic blackness done for American opera?

The Presence of African-American Timbre in American Opera

American Studies scholar Ruth Frankenberg studies whiteness through the stories of white women's lives. One of her informants said that as a "white girl", she had "nothing"—no culture, no people, and that being white was like being cultureless (Frankenberg 1993: 122, 196). Another interviewee remarked that in the sixties, when slogans such as "Proud to be Black," or "Proud to be Hispanic" appeared, it was popular to be proud of your ethnicity. Even feminists could say that they were proud to be women, but still a majority of the country had nothing, in this regard, to be proud of. The women in the study linked whiteness to capitalism, viewing nonwhite cultures as unsoiled and unspoiled, and unconsciously drawing on colonial discourse wherein the West stands for progress and industrialization while others occupy themselves with tradition and culture (Frankenberg 200).

With the maintenance of the black body, a project based on an illusion of continuing insulation from progress and modernization, the African-American opera singer's voice seems to offer a promise of non-white vitality and the possibility of filling a void in white culture. In the words of Ronald Radano, "If Euro-Americans 'won the race' in economic terms, they also—many believe—paid the price with their souls (Radano 2003: 24)." In this "economy of loss" white opera capitalizes on distinct and recognizable black bodies and voices, which may be able to revitalize standard repertoire.

“Authentic” Voice

In choosing Marian Anderson to break the color barrier, although she was years beyond her vocal prime, the Met chose someone who symbolized quiet perseverance and patience. Anderson was a singer who could be heard through “the new mode of hearing,” *ethnosympathy*. Was “the door,” as Anderson’s Met debut was dubbed by the *New York Times* writer, only opened for those who could credibly be heard through this particular filter? Ronald Radano has suggested that the “success of the Fisk Jubilees intensified the growing sense of cultural inadequacy that had been inflicting white middle-class Americans since the invention of the idea of ‘Negro music’ as it weakened the effectiveness of black containment strategies (Radano 2003: 260-261).” I argue that hearing African-American singers highly successfully singing the operatic repertoire has triggered a similar reaction. Acousmatic blackness, the presence of the black body, in a voice that otherwise meets all standards of a professional classical voice, is thereby maintained in the voice of the African-American in classical music and opera. While managers and directors are wary of acknowledging the visual color line, acousmatic blackness is unconsciously present and at work in the decision making regarding casting.

Conclusion

Many may perceive the type of racial bias we are studying as outdated or antiquated. However, just this last June, San Francisco based soprano Hope Briggs was

fired at the eleventh and one half hour from the role of Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, sparking a storm of protest letters and articles claiming that the firing was based on race. Briggs had already sung the final dress rehearsal before she was notified that she was no longer “desired” in the role and was to be replaced by Elza van den Heever, a young soprano from the San Francisco Opera’s young artist program. General Director David Gockley claimed in a formal announcement that Brigg’s voice “was not ultimately suited for this role in this production (Kosma).”⁸⁴

Neither the *San Francisco Chronicle* nor the *New York Times* (*New York Times*, June 2, 2007) were overt in identifying the motivation for the firing. However, both newspapers did raise serious questions through reports from unnamed sources within the opera house that Ms. Briggs sounded fine during the dress rehearsal, expressing a lack of comprehension for why she was dismissed from the role. Both publications also considered the relevance of race in the decision. It is understandably difficult to uncover all the underlying reasons for the firing of Ms. Briggs. However, as Mitchell noted, since success in this profession is largely a matter of taste, a singer may certainly be rejected on the grounds that his or her voice is “not suited” for the performance. Whiteness as a timbral quality is not mentioned in the operatic world. “When whiteness qua whiteness does come into focus,” Richard Dyer writes, “it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death (1993: 141).” However, claims of black essence are necessarily pre-supposed by an assumption of white essence—a distinction that will not fade until “white society” fully and completely renounces racial categorization. “It’s up

⁸⁴ Kosman, Joshua. Saturday, June 2, 2007. “Company fires soprano from production at 11th hour -- director defends decision.” *SF Chronicle*. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/06/02/DDGU5Q63821.DTL>. Accessed June 5, 2007.

to you,” James Baldwin observes, “As long as you think you’re ‘white,’ there’s no home for you. As long as you think you’re ‘white,’ I am going to be forced to think I’m ‘black.’”⁸⁵ It is because we continuously believe in racial difference that we “enact those differences in sound,” Radano writes (2003: xiii).

The cognition of racialized vocal timbre, or simply the rubric of African-American vocal timbre, is based as we saw in the previous chapter on a pedagogy founded on the assumption that perceptual distinctions of timbre vary across phenotypes. In the United States, the aural perception of the black voice singing classical music is sonically filtered by the spiritual, by minstrel song and by performance thereof. The conventions of minstrelsy and additional modalities through which the spiritual first was perceived are the sonic filters that constitute the acousmatic blackness of the African-American classical voice. Long after practices such as minstrel shows ceased to be performed in the shapes and forms we know them, acousmatic blackness is retained and reified on an ongoing basis as a dynamic of racial and ethnic bias.

⁸⁵ Interview with James Baldwin in the documentary film *The Price of the Ticket* (1990).

Voice Lesson Two

My Mom's Story

June 20, 2006
La Jolla, California

Flashback to: 1984, Molde, Norway

It is one of those blue, summer nights. The longest of them all. June 21. I am nine and sitting by a table lit by a wavering candle, as the midsummer night sun peeks its way through the pale light curtains, drawing a lingering shade of blue around my family and me in our small kitchen.

It is Sunday morning, 2 a.m. My parents, brother, sister and I have just gotten back from a late night of fishing at a special spot my dad had discovered years ago. We are preparing a meal of fresh-caught cod and its obligatory companion of boiled potatoes. By this time of the year the potatoes are old. So old that they have turned into creatures, aliens really, with skin too big for their desiccated innards. We can hardly wait for harvest to start in a month or so just to bring us a fresh, new crop of spuds.

But, none of this matters right now. I am listening to my mother begin to tell a familiar tale.

“You didn’t utter any sound for an entire week,” she starts in, standing by the sink peeling the potato creatures.

How I love to hear this story of coming to voice. Still to this day, over twenty years later, it pulls me in. It is the story of a two-year-old, who displaces from her roots, is given a new passport, new nationality, new name, new home and parents. It is the story

of a curious, little girl who, though temporarily mute, must have been listening intensely to her new parents as they sang a prayer—a prayer that they always sang before every shared meal.

Oh, you who feel the little bird
Please bless our food, Oh Lord

In 1977, I surely must have listened to that song as if my life depended on it, as if those notes were the seed to my existence in this new soil, just as I was the seed to this young couple's new life as parents.

Like a little bird, I had come to them on the wings of a prayer. For many years, my parents waited and waded through unimaginable fjords of paper work and examinations, hoping to get approval to adopt a child. The countless evenings that my mother—a young, green-eyed woman—raced home from work on her rickety old bike to see whether the envelope with news of the child they longed for had arrived in the mail.

And now that child—an almond-shaped, brown-eyed girl from South-Korea—her parents, and two other children, also adopted from the Land of the Morning Calm, have been a family for many years.

“*Mamma,*” I ask, knowing full well what the answer will be, “I was quite for seven whole days?”

At the age of nine, seven days without speaking is utterly incomprehensible.

“Yes, seven whole days and nights,” my mother answers matter-of-factly. “It was at breakfast that you finally uttered a sound. To your father and me it came completely unexpectedly.”

Is seven a magical number? I used to ask myself. Does it have something to do with biblical stories of creation? It took God seven days to create the world. The Egyptians had to suffer seven years of deprivation before they experienced seven years of abundance. Seven days. Seven nights. This was the length of time it took for me to absorb and respond to a new environment—to create a voice that might be my own.

My parents have always told me that the voice I used was not the typical voice of a child, a voice that looks to its parents for support and reassurance. Rather it was a voice that projected with absolutely no sign of hesitation. Each note was approached head-on. Words that, just minutes before, should have been like a foreign language to me were pronounced perfectly.

*Å du som metter liten fugl
Velsign vår mat å Gud*

This is why I love this story, and why it still intrigues me. A mystery right here in my own ordinary body, involving my own voice.

Why did I, as child, two years of age and in complete displacement, chose to negotiate my own communication with, and relationship to, the world through singing? Did I feel that my only means of casting myself into the world was by suspending my words, leaning into my voice, on some designated pitches? Did I sense that through

singing I could shoot a part of myself—my voice—out into the universe and hope that it would reverberate back to me, carrying some kernel of information vital to my survival?

When after a week of silence I finally uttered a sound, *I* was heard.

Chapter 3

Vocaloid: Synthesizing Race

Introduction

I remember watching the final verdict in the trial of California v. Orenthal James Simpson on television on a steaming hot October day in 1995. That was the official end of a case filled with intricate, barely credible story lines of money, desire, and control – not unlike the issues I bring up in this chapter. As the lines from OJ Simpson’s trial from the epigraph in the introductory chapter pointed to, this is also a story about the sound of “the voice of a Black man”—an oft-repeated story that tells us that it is common sense that the “color” of sound exists. It is the story of the racial imagination, of the conviction that, in the words of Ronald Radano, “blackness and whiteness of sound is fundamentally, essentially, real (quoted in Stras 2007: 209).” I will approach this issue by way of introducing to you the vocalist Lola. (Audiotrack 1: “Day Oh”).

Lola’s audience had their own “trial” on the internet. RobotArchie wrote about Lola’s voice: “Do we have a British soul singer with a Japanese accent who lisps like a Spaniard? Eesa makea me tho unhappy....” Heatviper chimes in: “Hello... I think Lola works great for mondo/mournful/giallo morricone style tracks using vowels....wordless soulful vowels are nice.” Jogomus asks for advice: “My Lola sounds a little bit like a “big Ma” - what can I do, [so] that she sounds a little bit neutral?” HK suggests lowering the “Gender Factor”⁸⁶ value.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ One of the functions in Vocaloid.

In Chapters 1 and 2 I investigated issues of racial classification of vocal timbre, an artifact of the different social and historical processes through which vocal sounds have been infused with meaning. Although approached from two different historical perspectives, we saw that they are still actualized today. In unraveling the voice of Lola I found a microcosmos, a stylized environment that reproduced historically grounded notion of a racialized vocal timbre in contemporary digital form.

Getting to know Lola, Leon and Miriam

Lola, launched in 2004, is a vocal synthesis software program developed by the British music software company Zero-G. The vocal synthesis system, Vocaloid, used to create Lola and her male counterpart, Leon, was developed at Pompeu Fabra University in Spain in collaboration with the Yamaha Corporation. For Lola's voice, approximately 3000 phonemes—30 hours of recording—were recorded and manually trimmed into small samples (Figure 7). With the software interface, the user enters the pitches and spells out the words before the program processes them into a phonetic version readable by computers.⁸⁷ The initial track is very basic. Vibrato, accents, dynamics and envelopes must be added manually to phrases to create a voice with a more human-like inflection.

Technical details which will help make the voice sound a particular way are often discussed on the online user forum (from which the quotes about Lola's voice were taken) where the users, mainly semi-professional musicians from the England and the

⁸⁷ These quotations are taken from the Vocaloid user forum: <http://www.vocaloid-user.net/> (accessed July 25, 2006.)

⁸⁸ The Speech Assessment Methods Phonetic Alphabet (SAMPA)—a modified version of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

United States with a wide range of ages and musical styles, exchange technical expertise and sound tracks. The piece “Day Oh,” a track created by “Robert Vocaleaner,” is a typical example of the songs shared among Vocaloid users—pieces that have cemented their places in our popular culture, such as this one popularized by Harry Belafonte.

Vocaloid is a music technology; it is sound synthesis. However, the packaging of Lola and Leon is unambiguous in its portrayal of the intended racial profile of these voices (see Figures 5 & 6). Unlike Cantor, another commercially available synthesis software package which advertises with a rather non-specific box, Lola and Leon are full lipped in a protruded position offering up a voice (or perhaps a body). The image cropped very close as to eliminate any associations to a real person. Lola and Leon are wrapped in images that play on blackface iconography. Like a stock figure returning in various minstrel repertoire, the picture used for both Lola and Leon is the same. The designer simply mirrored the blue tinted image of Leon and re-colored it red for the package of Lola.

In considering the packaging of the third voice released by Vocaloid, Miriam, advertised as a “British pop voice,” we discover a contrasting image to that of Lola and Leon (see Figure 5). Gracing the package of the Vocaloid voice Miriam is Miriam Stockley, the singer whose voice was actually used to record the phonemes for the synthesis. Not only is her entire head is displayed, but most of her body. She looks active, as in movement towards her next big job. And, because most of her body is featured and we get a general, visual impression of her, one can imagine the exuberant confidence projected from her.

When comparing these three package choices, Lola and Leon are objectified by the design and layout. We as consumers are invited to look at their stylized features at their stylized features from the side. Body parts that historically have been fetishized and marked as Other—the nose and the lips—are used to sell this product. In contrast, Miriam is depicted as a whole person looking straight back at both the software creators and users.

When asked about the choice of imagery to accompany Lola and Leon, Dom Keefe, the manager for the project, replied: “I guess they picked a generic face that looked like a soul singer.”⁸⁹ This is also what Zero-G’s director, Ed Stratton, dubbed Lola and Leon in a New York Times interview: “their generic soul singers (Werde 2003).”

Zero-G’s Lola and Leon are not sold simply as software that could produce sounds with human-like qualities. Rather, they are presented through verbal and visual means as vocalists with a clearly designated gender, age group and race: one female, one male voice—both young adults of African descent. The images used to personify Lola and Leon resonate with an era of blackface performance, in which a degrading representation of the Other, in this case African Americans in the United States, was created and the performer’s own voice was projected through and as this character.

Once Zero-G’s overall profile of the “generic soul singer” had been created, what sort of singer would fulfill the sonic image it required? The manager for the project, Dom Keefe, told me that the man who recorded the samples for Leon is “black and English - he is a lovely guy as well (Dom Keefe, email message to author, October 19, 2006).”

⁸⁹ Dom Keefe, email message to author, October 19, 2006. He adds: “in fact if you look at the two boxes you will see that they used the same image for both Leon and Lola but in reverse.”

About Lola, I was told that she was also “black.” Interestingly, the senior programmer pointed out that when he heard her sing soul material, she sounded idiomatically like a soul singer. However, when the syllables she recorded were put together into phrases, an unexpected accent came through and this became problematic to explain to the users. The programmer told me about online exchanges with users wherein he, with convoluted technical explanations of the synthesis method, tried to hide the fact that some users found her pronunciation strange or unexpected because of her Caribbean background. In selecting singers to provide the samples when engineering a “generic soul singing voice,” the black body was conflated with “soul sound.”

Stereotyping in Representation

We saw in the two previous chapters that these molds, these stereotypical representations were brought about by narratives rooted in the past and see now how they are actualized in the present. These webs are deeply integrated into the ways we learn to experience the world: if we have learned to be politically correct and not pay attention to their visual aspects, these invisible networks are projected through sound. Sander Gilman has contributed influential studies on stereotyping taken to a pathological level. In his book *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (1985), the psychological origin of stereotyping is discussed.

The term *stereotype* arose to describe a new printing technology in late 18th century Europe wherein multiple papier-mâché copies were cast from a papier-mâché mold. By the mid-19th century the term was used metaphorically, as in “a stereotyped

expression”, and by the early 20th century social psychologists had adopted the term to describe “the image,” in Gilman’s words, “through which we categorize the world (Gilman 1985: 16).” Thus the origin of the term *stereotype* describes a technique in which a mold is created and used to make identical copies. Or, we could define it as the notion that *something has to fit the pre-created mold*, conforming to rigid structures.

Each of us utilizes stereotypes to organize our perceptions of the world. Why?⁹⁰ Stereotypes exaggerate what we fear, thereby protecting us by distancing us from it. A child begins to divide the world into “good” and “bad.” Split in two, the controllable part of the life of the child is labeled “good,” while the uncontrollable part is labeled “bad.” By labeling the uncontrollable part (the part we fear) “bad,” the feeling of loss of control is abated. The “good” self is free from anxiety, while the “bad” self is full of anxiety. Thus, the self and the world are split into “good” and “bad” objects, and the child is protected from having to confront the contradictions between aspects of itself.

The self and the world are built on structures of “us” and “them,” “self” and “Other.” There is no initial boundary between the self and the Other, therefore we must create a rigid one. This boundary corresponds to the stresses and anxieties produced by our mental processes. When the stress and anxiety shift, our mental image of the world changes, and at that point the dividing line between self and Other may also change. This shift in our mental representation of the world can stimulate us to change from, in the words of Gilman, “fearing to glorifying the Other (Gilman 18).”

⁹⁰ The following discussion is based on Sander L. Gilman’s (1985: 16-35).

Thus stereotypes arise when a person's feeling of self-integration is threatened. Stereotyping is a way of dealing with our unstable perceptions of the world. We stereotype to "maintain our illusion of control over the self and the world (Gilman 18)."

We project the "source of our anxiety onto objects in the world," through models in the social world we know. Gilman points out that such "models are not 'random' nor 'archetypical' (29)." The Other is externalized through a set of vocabularies (this includes timbral vocabulary) and images possessed by each social group. These vocabularies are neither random nor isolated from historical contexts. Such images are products of the histories and cultures that keep them alive. All "structured systems of representation, no matter what the medium," writes Gilman, "can be construed as 'text' for the study of stereotypes." He continues, "all are texts in that they function as structured expression of the inner world in our mental representation (26)." Technology was, for a brief moment in the mid-twentieth century, theorized as a potentially race- and gender-blind space. However, as we have seen in the case of the Vocaloid voices, a sound that most people find very machine-like is racialized as "black" in Lola's and "white" in Miriam's software package. The racialized body is heavily embedded in the identity of this software.

Calculating Race

As was argued in chapters 1 and 2, racialized meanings and associations commonly assigned to vocal color are *not inherent* to the voice, or to the body through which it is produced. Vocaloid perpetuates ideas about racialized voices and bodies by drawing upon and circulating preexisting notions of vocal difference. These ideas are fully formalized and disseminated through the Vocaloid software, a stylized, frozen moment in the process of racializing vocal timbre. By studying the strategies used by Zero-G in the creation of Lola and Leon, we can see to what extent their ideas about the racialized body and sound are naturalized. Even music technologies such as Vocaloid—with the potential to create entirely new sonic taxonomies—persistently build these notions into their products. Vocaloid re-creates and perpetuates the notion that vocal sounds are intertwined with, and inseparable from, race.

Because we believe in a racial body, we believe in a racialized voice. The story of Vocaloid speaks to the commodity value of, and the desire for such categories. Vocal timbre—the color of the voice—has in many cases been seized and folded into meanings provided by hegemonic mechanisms, rather than by any one individual’s engagement with her own instrument and its acoustic environment. We need to challenge the cultural mechanisms that encourage us to perceive a vocal sound through a top-down notion of the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic context are vocally expressed, specifically addressing the elaborate topologies of race institutionalized through the racializing of vocal timbre.

When the imagination and construction of race as a manifestation of difference is believed to resonate in a physical body embedded in a long history of categorization

according to phenotype, it is commonly assumed that it is the body which automatically creates the sound emitted, rather than learned behavior. The voice arises from the internal cavities of the body and therefore is mythologized, believed to carry an uncensored truth. What are the deep consequences of such belief which are thought to be common sense?

In 1999, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled that a conviction was appropriately based solely on a police officer's identification of a suspect whose voice the officer heard on an audio transmission. The officer identified the suspect as a black male and testified that during his 13 years as a policeman he had had several conversations with black men and therefore was able to identify the voice of a black male. In his ruling the judge stated that no one would find it inappropriate for an officer to identify the voice of a woman, hence "we perceive no reason why a witness could not likewise identify a voice as being that of a particular race or nationality, so long as the witness is personally familiar with the general characteristics, accents or speech patterns of the race or nationality in question (Johnson 2000)."

In this Kentucky Supreme Court case identification of racial identity was based singularly on the sound of the voice. Such assumptions are founded, generally speaking, on the premise that different ethnic groups possess distinct physiologies which offer limited sonic possibilities. However, it has been confirmed by numerous scientists who study the voice that there are no more common biological vocal characteristics between individuals from the same ethnic group than there are between members of different ethnic groups.⁹¹

⁹¹ For example, Hans von Leden, in conversation with author, May 24, 2006; Richard Miller (1986); Rubinstein (1980).

A particular kind of vocal taxonomy is revealed through the Vocaloid software, in which racial profiling through vocal timbre and articulation is fully formalized. And a particular kind of bodily taxonomy is evident in the ways in which most people think about the voice. The human voice is flexible beyond imagination. But, as in scenarios such as the Kentucky Supreme Court case, and in the aftermath of 9/11, legalized voice surveillance is paired with racialized bodies and voices are perpetually *essentialized*. The sounds of music and the sounds of the singing voice do not possess inherent meanings. Therefore, the identities we read into these sounds are constructions based in the “traditions” of society, to use Gordon Allport’s term (quoted in Gilman 1985: 20).

Theorizing In the Acoustic Shadow

With these three different case studies I have not only wished to examine the historical and cultural processes through which vocal timbre is racialized and thereby how acousmatic blackness is activated. I have also wished to illustrate that by analyzing *sound* current vocal analysis is situated in an *acoustic shadow*. An acoustic shadow is an area in immediate proximity to the source of a loud sound. The sound is projected not to its immediate locale but rather reaches further. Ironically, the space most immediately close to the source is thereby in its acoustic shadow and the sound is not audible. The implication of this analogy is that by examining only the music, lyrics, and timbre we have the same blind spots as the paradigm that caused them.

My ongoing project, therefore, attempts, through a close look at the *activity* of singing and at the creation of the singer’s (or software’s) voice—which takes place in the

interaction between singer and audience—to identify the ways in which the use of the voice plays a central role in the creation of selfhood, for both the singer and the listener. Through a close observation of this process, and through examining the phenomenology of the body, I attempt to extract a theory and analysis of the choreography, the embodied activity of singing and listening to the sound of the voice. I suggest that by relocating the search for the meaning of the voice from “the sound itself” to the *processes* that take place between the sound and the listener, we may begin the process of decolonizing vocal timbre. In the second part of this dissertation I hope to provide the theoretical foundation that may bring us towards a theorizing of vocal timbre out of the acoustic shadow.

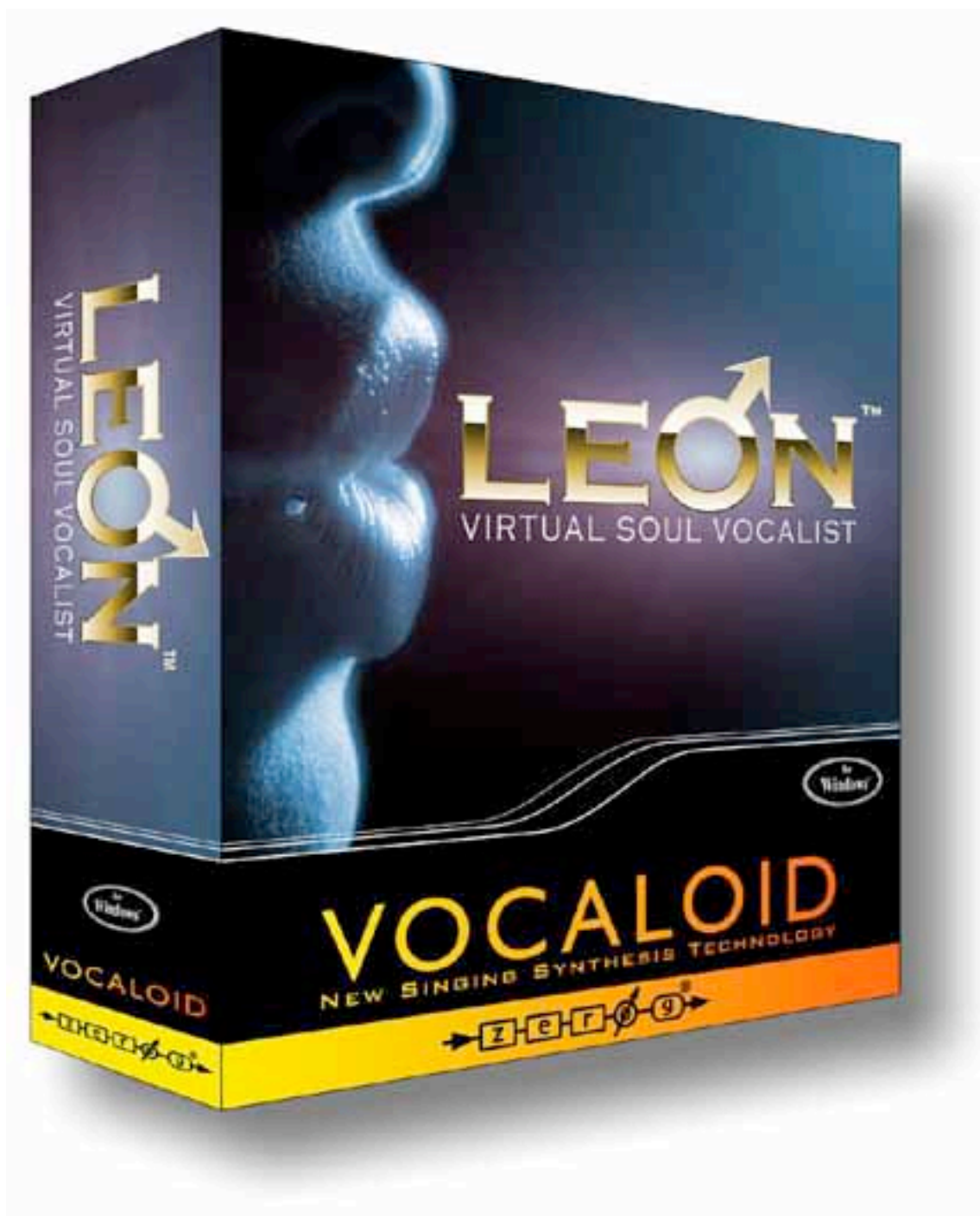


Figure 5 Leon

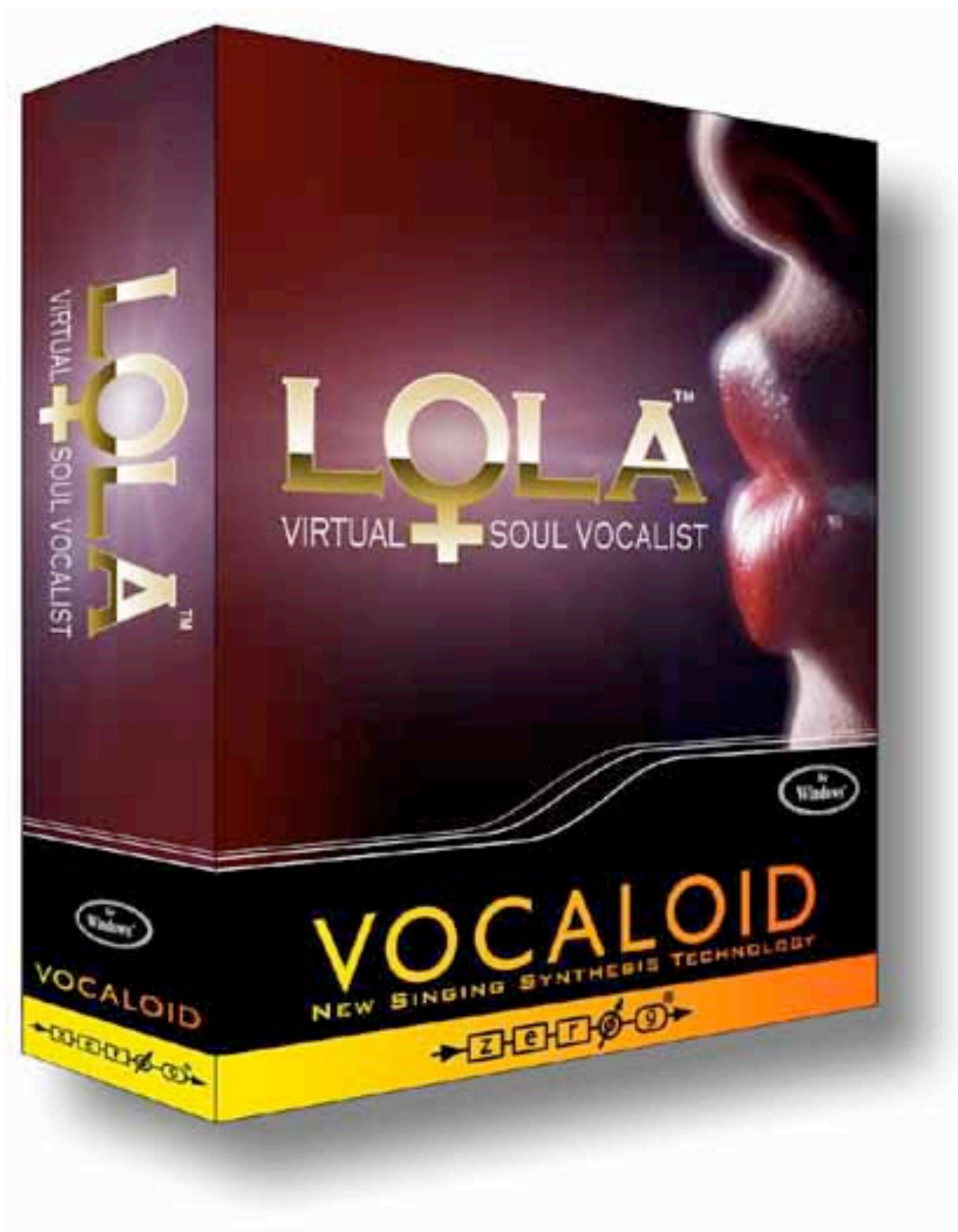


Figure 6 Lola



Figure 7 Miriam

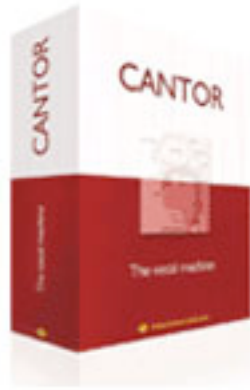


Figure 8 Cantor

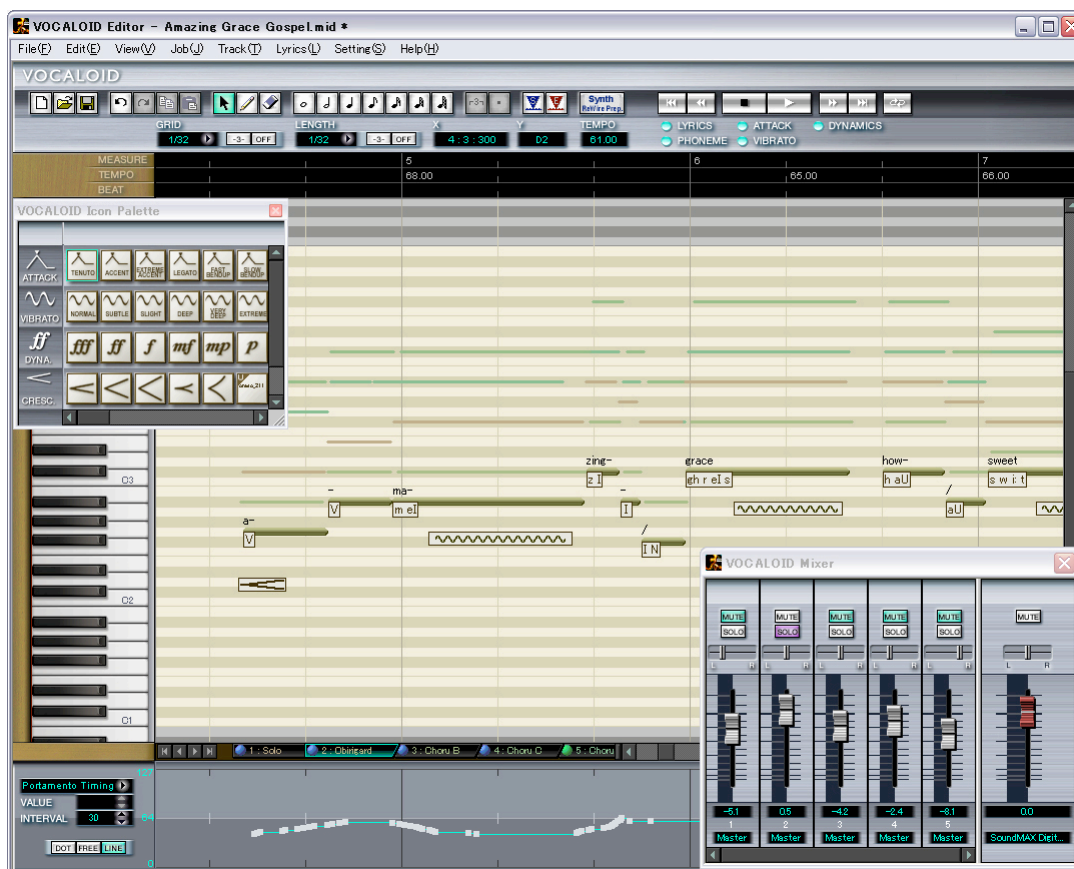


Figure 9 Screenshot of the Vocaloid Interface

Part Two

Chapter 4

Meaning and Affect Through Vocal Timbre

Introduction

This chapter examines the central issue raised by the case studies in Part I: the assumption that the sound of the singing voice, the character of which is revealed by its timbre, holds essential information about race. This investigation focuses on the ways in which categories crucial to individual identity have come to be articulated through timbre. In essence, this chapter disputes the notion that (racial or other) identities are corporeally immanent and timbrally projected. Instead, it advances music as a social and cultural process, one that brings into being affect and meaning. By investigating the ways cultural processes of affect and meaning production may be elucidated through the examination of music, and conversely how, by studying the ways music operates within a larger cultural context, we may gain knowledge of the ways in which certain meanings and affects are produced.

Chapter 4 draws on the theoretical foundation regarding music, affect and meaning drawn out of a larger theoretical scheme developed by John Shepherd, Peter Wicke and Richard Middleton exemplified by *Music and Cultural Theory* (1997) and *Studying Popular Music* (1990). With this material I establish an understanding of the

relationship between the material reality offered by sound and the meaning and affect we invest in that sound. Because at the heart of this discussion lies the question of how sounds in music in general, and vocal timbre in particular, signify, by understanding this relationship, any suspicion of a connection between an essential racial body and essential racial sound may be dispersed. This chapter explains the kinds of relationships between various levels of sound and meaning that I will be addressing. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to theoretically underpin the chapters that follow and to give legitimacy to the kinds of relationships between meaning and the sound of meaning I will be teasing out in the discussions that follow this chapter.

In order to develop an understanding of how meaning or identity may be articulated through timbre, we may look to the ways musical signification arises. The semiology of music is highly influenced by, and has sometimes been viewed as interchangeable with the semiology of language. Therefore, as we begin to look at signification in music, it will be important to draw out the ways in which sounds in music signify differently than do sounds in language. I will furthermore investigate the relationships between the material realities of sound and the meanings constructed through and drawn from those materialities. This discussion will propel us forward to address the possibilities of a semiology of timbre. Because it is impossible to consider such a semiology of timbre (and more specifically a semiology of vocal timbre) without also considering the bodies and people implicated in timbral production, this chapter points to one of the main question I engage throughout this dissertation: Is a semiology of vocal timbre a semiology of bodies?

Signification in language

In the fields of sociology, communication, and cultural studies (knowledge upon which studies of music have drawn), an understanding of the signification mechanisms of sounds in language is largely derived from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1966). According to Saussure's theory of language, we need to distinguish between a word in a language and the concept that word evokes. The meaning of the word in the language is evoked by the linguistic context, and therefore there is no fixity of meaning in relation to external reality. That is, a distinction must be made between "the *value* of a word *in language*" and the word's "*signification*" in a context of external reality (Shepherd and Wicke 16. Their italics). For example, the word "bird" exists and functions within the English language. Its signification was achieved independently of *a priori* characteristic behaviors of birds in the real world.

Thus, in order to distinguish between the 'signifier' (or combination of sounds) and the 'signified' (or mental concept associated through the structures of language) within the combination of sounds recognized as meaningful by people with knowledge of that language, we need to be keenly aware of the relationship between words, language, and external reality. For Saussure it is not the sound of the word "bird," but the psychological image of the sound—the signifier—which is constituted in individual experience and refers to the mental concept which we named 'bird.' Thus, in Saussure's words, "The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image (Saussure 1966: 66)."⁹² As a consequence, language produces an arbitrary

⁹² Thank you to Shepherd and Wicke for pointing me to this quote. It should be noted that since Saussure's time, however, the signifier has come to mean "the inherent characteristics of the sounds which constitute a word (Shepherd and Wicke 17)."

relationship between the signifier and the signified, but because these relationships have become so heavily conventionalized within the structure of language, they appear to be inseparable.

Understanding of signification in music when drawn from theories of signification in language

Because Saussure's work has been so heavily drawn upon, the dominant position in sociology, communication, and cultural studies⁹³ (Shepherd and Wicke 11) has been that unlike sounds of language, sounds in music do not refer in obvious ways to "the world of objects, events or linguistically encoded ideas" exterior to themselves (Shepherd and Wicke 20). The prevailing argument has been that music, in other words, signifies⁹⁴ non-denotatively. Sounds in music have been understood as "occasioning a ground of physiological and affective stimulation which is subsequently interpellated into the symbolic order of language (Shepherd and Wicke 20)." According to this model, sounds in music first take on significance when entering into the social world: meaning in music

⁹³ Although a range of disciplines—musicology, sociology, communication and cultural studies—have kept analysis of music's sound separate from the sociocultural process. Musicology's tendency has historically been to consider the meaning of music as separate from social and cultural forces. Music's meaning is thus reduced to "the condition of music's sound (Shepherd and Wicke 15)."

⁹⁴ With *Music and Cultural Theory*, Shepherd and Wicke aim to "feed musicology into cultural theory" (4). They point to the tendency of cultural studies to "[insist] that the only legitimate way to examine music as a signifying practice is to examine specific musical practices in the circumstances of their historical contingency. To examine music in any other way is to invite the charge of essentialism if not idealism" (3). Their main concern with this approach is the way in which "[this] inconsistency of approach then results in music as a signifying practice being treated as if there were no alternative but to assume that it signifies, in the circumstances of its historical contingencies, as if it were language (which it clearly is not)" (3). They insist that music "is no different from language in that it is a signifying practice with its own particular characteristics that, as a socially and culturally constituted form of expression and knowledge, gives rise to affects and meanings specific – and indissolubly so – to particular sets of historical contingencies" (3).

is therefore composed exclusively through a discursive process. That is, sounds in music and sounds in language are equally arbitrary in their relationships to processes of signification.

So far in this discussion, the only difference between signification in language and signification in music is that sounds in music are dependent on the arbitrary signifying processes of language in order to take on meaning. Because signification in music is not bound by the conventional (linguistic) associations between signifiers and signifieds, the processes of signification through sounds in music are yet another step removed (in terms of the relationship between the signifier and signified) than are processes of signification through sounds in language. Basing signification of sounds in music on a linguistic model would position music as, in the words of Shepherd and Wicke, “an empty sign in the sense that its sounds can be taken to be completely polysemic in nature, capable of all meanings because, in and of themselves they are capable of none (Shepherd and Wicke 21).”

In terms of the position I have just laid out, with which neither Shepherd, Wicke, nor I agree, the boundary of meaning construction in music is determined in a protolinguistic fashion by the context in which the music finds itself. It is to the question of this boundary, along with a consideration of the materiality of sound, that I now turn.

How signification Through Sounds In Music Differs From Signification Through Sounds in Language

In *Music and Cultural Theory* Shepherd and Wicke argue that music is a “distinct and irreducible signifying practice (2),” different from language which also, through speech, signifies through sound. The manner in which music signifies, in terms of both structure and semiology, is unique. While on the one hand music does not signify in a fundamentally denotative way, on the other it is also constituted as a material structure⁹⁵ whose role it is to pass on the “principles of symbolic structuring to society, language and other forms of human expression (3).” In other words, while the inherent condition of the sounds in music does not signify a fixed meaning, the condition of the material structure plays a key role in imparting social and symbolic processes. By insisting that music is as basic to the formation and preservation of human society as are other expressive forms such as language, Shepherd and Wicke maintain that the social character of music flows not only from the inimitable ways in which it contributes to social processes but also, despite the lack of a fixed inherent meaning, from its ability to symbolize social processes (Shepherd and Wicke 3). In fundamental terms, from the moment a human recognizes a sound to be that of music, rather than merely noise or speech, its value is formed within an active social process between its material reality and the listeners with whom it interacts, and who interact with it.

It is not only the potential of the sounds in music to be recognized as music, rather than as the sounds that constitute language, that distinguishes music from language. On

⁹⁵ By the term “material structure” I, along with Shepherd and Wicke, simply refer to the *sounds* that are constituted as music. That material structure does not refer to the nature of the instruments involved in sonic production – whether, for example, the music is created by a large ensemble or by a soloist. Music’s material structure simply refers to the sound, and likens that sound to a physical structure.

an elementary level, sounds in music and sounds in language do not signify in the same way. The main difference in the signifying processes of language and music lies in the intersection between sound and its relationship to what is being signified: sounds in language signify in arbitrary ways, while sounds in music, despite the fact that no meaning is inherent, do not signify in entirely arbitrary ways. One of the central questions addressed in *Music and Cultural Theory*, and also a question I pursue in detail as it relates to the sound of the singing voice as used in music, is “the tension between the opposing poles of the arbitrary and the immanent in relation to significance in music (Shepherd and Wicke 27).”

Definition of Terms and Concepts

In understanding the material involvement of sound in the construction of affect, it is necessary to understand four concepts that are centrally involved: states of awareness, elements of signification, the medium and the sonic saddle.

The term *states of awareness*—clearly socially constructed and socially mediated—describes the mental concept of a sound, and not the elements of signification that that sound may pull forth. That is, states of awareness are mental concepts (not limited to sound and sounds in music) which then become elements of signification in actual instances of the articulation of meaning. States of awareness may be thought of as a reservoir of all the states of awarenesses that have occurred during a particular individual’s biography. This reservoir is like a kind of collection of rather diffused and unfocused states of awareness that are then brought into play when we are faced with, in

linguistic terms, the material fact of a signifier, or, in musical terms, a medium. What then happens is that from this reservoir of states of awareness much more focused signifieds or elements of signification are pulled forth into a reasonable degree of consciousness and a reasonable degree of definition.⁹⁶ This term has been charged with emphasizing the corporeal and somatic dimensions of meaning construction. Because it covers both cognition and affect in music, it illustrates the complex interplay between the two.

Elements of signification are "derived from states of awareness" (Shepherd and Wicke 170) and therefore coexists with them. There is a close and dependent relationship between states of awareness and elements of signification. According to Shepherd and Wicke, we may imagine elements of signification as the signified, while states of awareness may be constituted as mental concepts (192). Although states of awareness are able to exist independently of elements of signification, elements of signification cannot exist without states of awareness. Given that forms of human communication, such as language and music, are implicated in the ways in which humans interact with the material world, Shepherd and Wicke (192) have argued that these lived realities are mediated through states of awareness, and elements of signification are engaged through signifying practices. For this study it is key to note that states of awareness and elements of signification can only be brought into play socially through material channels of communication, in the words of Shepherd and Wicke, a "materiality *which is specific to them* and whose particular configurations may be thought of flowing (through principles

⁹⁶ Shepherd and Wicke explain states of awareness by describing the mental concept of military drums evoked when hearing military drums, rather than the mental concept of 'militariness' evoked by military drums.

of convention, homology and iconicity) from the intentionalities invested in elements of signification by internal states of awareness (193. Their italics).” In short, elements of signification only occur in the here and now when we are confronted with a material phenomenon in the external world.

If sounds in music, unlike sounds in language, do not signify in completely arbitrary ways, and meaning is not immanent and therefore remains socially negotiable, how may we conceptualize the production of affect and meaning through sound? The specificity of the materiality, situatedness, and localness of sound, and the ways in which sound is part of articulating meaning is coherently theorized by Shepherd and Wicke as music as a “*medium* in sound (95. Their italics).” Sounds in music are offered up as “structured and structuring ground for construction of meaning (Wicke, 1999, 1990b).” Another way of thinking about this is that although we can of course never know the sounds of music objectively, the medium is the sounds of music as we might imagine them to exist objectively in the external world.

The concept of the *sonic saddle*, a term coined by Victor Zuckerkandl, reveals how sounds in music act as structure, and therefore is crucial to grasping the articulation of meaning through music. The sonic saddle is of course the construct that results from the interface between the medium and the elements of signification that the medium pulls forth from the states of awareness. And that is where we get that instantaneous material binding between the sonic saddle and elements of signification: for a fleeting moment they are one and the same phenomenon.

This is why music is so powerful affectively. Because, when we experience music we are bound into it in a way which in fact we cannot really control for each

passing second of the music—or we cannot really control it very much. So the binding of the sonic saddle and elements of signification is such that there is no possibility of any element of the arbitrary at that particular moment between elements of signification and the sonic saddle (which does not mean to say that under identical circumstances half an hour later that you do not get a material binding with different characteristics.) This is what allows elements of negotiation in the articulation of musical meaning, through the slippage that can and does occur as the sonic saddle is drawn forth from the medium by elements of signification that themselves are drawn forth from states of awareness by the particular characteristics of the medium.

Sound as Medium

“If the social negotiation of meaning through the *medium* of music’s sound is to remain a possibility conceptually [...] it must remain the case that sounds do not determine meanings, and that, conversely, meanings do not determine sound (Shepherd and Wicke 115).” Having developed a position which states that 1) while the meaning of sound in music is neither immanent nor completely arbitrary, and that 2) all meanings cannot be constructed through the same sounds (and one sound cannot mean everything), it is my task to address how the materiality of sound, without inheriting any meaning, restricts the possible range of meanings constructed through it. At the site of this conundrum between the seemingly repellent poles of the not-quite-arbitrary and the not-quite-immanent, the concept of the *medium* may be useful in moving the investigation forward.

Shepherd and Wicke utilize the concept of the medium as theorized in science, maintaining that it possesses the capacity for “offering up a structured and structuring ground for a construction of meaning that nonetheless remains socially negotiable (116).” They use the term medium “to mean an agent or a material substance in which a physical or chemical process takes place, but which remains unaffected by the process (116),” and describe what the term medium can do for their inquiry into meaning construction through sound in music thus:

As applied to an understanding of music, the concept of the medium has two distinguishing characteristics. Firstly, it conceptualizes the use of sounds in music as being [...] of a structural nature [...] Secondly, while the medium conceptualizes sounds in music as being in this way structured and structuring, it in no way assigns an *agency of achieving meaning* (and, *in this sense*, an agency of meaning construction) to them. [...] [As such,] [m]usic [shapes] the material grounds and potentials for meaning construction, not the processes of meaning construction themselves. (Shepherd and Wicke 116. Their italics.)

It is the second characteristic of this concept of music as medium that allows us to understand the construction of meaning through music as socially negotiable, but *not* arbitrary. Therefore, while the medium in a physical or chemical reaction determines what kinds of processes are possible within it, it does not determine the character of the processes. Likewise, the medium of music influences the kinds of cultural processes that can be carried out within it, but does not determine its character. “However, the characteristics of the sounds as medium cannot determine the characteristics of the cultural processes they make possible. As a consequence, they cannot determine meaning,” explain Shepherd and Wicke (116). “As a structured and structuring medium for – rather than agent of – the construction of meanings,” they conclude, “the sounds in

music both restrict and facilitate the range of meanings that in any instance can be constructed through them (116-117).”⁹⁷ It is this implication of the sonic medium in music that distinguishes sound in music from sound in language. Sound in music exists within a medium whose structural character is central to the processes of meaning constructed through it in a way that the structural character of sounds in language is not.

If the sounds in music constitute a medium which materially structures possible meanings through that sound, what does the interpellation of medium and meaning imply? “Sound acting as a medium,” propose Shepherd and Wicke, “becomes *materially* involved in calling forth from people elements of signification in a manner in which sound as signifiers do not (117).” How does the material involvement of the sound of music, as medium, affect signification?

The Sonic Saddle and the Articulation of Meaning Through Music

Zuckermandl’s theoretical concept of the sonic saddle is central to Shepherd and Wicke’s development of a (second – or, as it turns out, third) semiology of music. The sonic saddle provides a gathering ground for conceptualizing signification not only through the medium of music, but also syntactically. As such, it provides a tool for theorizing “how each passing auditory and affective moment can reveal sounds in music acting as structure (159).”

⁹⁷ Richard Middleton has worked extensively on the question of levels of signification in music. He draws a distinction between syntactical and semantic analysis. Syntactic analysis refers to the manner in which individual notes are related to one another melodically, harmonically and rhythmically, while the semantic refers to connotative impressions. Shepherd and Wicke use the character of ‘oceaness’ that Debussy’s *La Mer* evokes as an example of a connotative impression.

Meaning in music is articulated through the continually unfolding saddle of the medium, which is to say, the sonic saddle of the present. However, while the saddle of the medium occurs as an aspect of external reality, as the sounds of the auditory time-space of the external world, it is possible to conceive of the sonic saddle *only* as an experiential phenomenon made possible by the medium. (Shepherd and Wicke 159-160)

It might be argued that the sonic saddle occupies the space in which the signifier in linguistic terms would be found. However, the two are quite dissimilar in character and possibilities. The sonic saddle provides the space for several levels of simultaneous articulation—the overlay of timbral dimensions and internal structures (160) provides the “continually unfolding sound-image derived from the medium and *experienced* as the material ground and pathway for the investment of meaning (Shepherd and Wicke 170).”

In this equation we replace the concept of the signified with a rather more general notion of ‘elements of signification.’ (See Figure 10 for this discussion.)

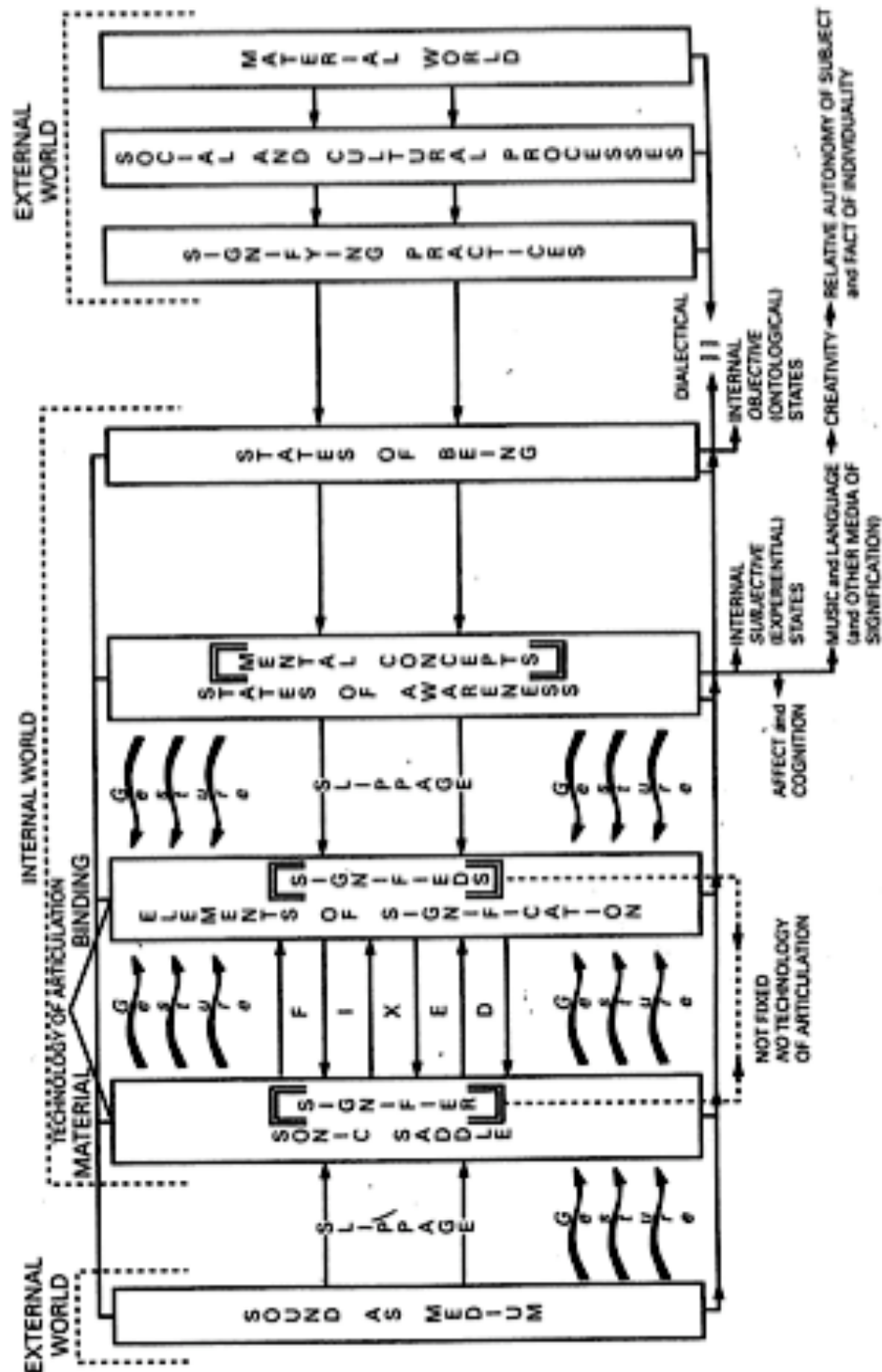


Figure 10 "Semiological Model" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 172

As we recall, *states of awareness* refers to the mental image of a sonic concept, and with such an image we may compare elements of signification with the signified. It has been stated previously that whereas states of awareness may exist independently of public articulation, it is impossible for elements of signification to exist independently of actual instances of the material articulation of meaning. But because socialization gives rise to a sense of identity (not the other way around), states of awareness are not independent of the social process. However, states of awareness may exist as experiences independent of the “public articulation of meaning in the *presence* of the here-and-now (Shepherd and Wicke 171).” In other words, states of awareness in the *presence* of the here-and-now may constitute individual experiences without a public articulation, and therefore without a material, which is to say musical, existence in the external world.

Because elements of signification are both derived from and coexist with states of awareness—the “corporeal and somatic dimension” of the construction of meaning through music—the term covers both cognition and affect (Shepherd and Wicke 171) (see Figure 12); it also includes the interplay between the two as it is realized in music. And because states of awareness give rise to elements of signification, they are experiential in character, matching the experiential character of the sonic saddle.

These terms and concepts allow us to conceptualize the differences in the process of signification between sounds of language and sounds of music, which we may situate in the *technology of articulation*. Because the presence of this technology coterminous with the experience of music constitute a material binding, it is different from the processes present in language. This binding is therefore not due to a direct ‘association’ between the sonic saddle and states of awareness; rather,

It is for this reason that the slippage which can occur – and necessarily so – between the sounds of the medium in music and the individual's states of awareness occurs between the sounds of the medium as presented to us by external reality and the sonic saddle as the experience of those sounds at each particular moment of their occurrence, as well as between states of awareness fixed in relation to elements of signification which *are* instigated through the presentation of a medium and 'associated' sonic saddle, *and* similar although somewhat changed states of awareness *not* immanent in the materiality of public articulation. (Shepherd and Wicke 172)

Thus, the relationship between the sonic saddle, on the one hand, and elements of signification on the other (in terms of a model of signification in music) makes it possible to compare the relationship between the signifier on one hand and the signified on the other (in terms of a model of signification in language). In this loose comparison the sonic saddle is closest to the signifier, and elements of signification are closest to signifieds. I have so far failed to mention that states of awareness (in terms of a model of signification in music) could be compared to mental concepts (in terms of a model of signification in language).

The material binding between the sonic saddle and the elements of signification is the technology of articulation represented by sounds in music and the articulation of meaning through that medium. The state of non-fixity between signifier and signified in language points to a lack of technologies of articulation in language. Thus, whereas in language the connection between the signifier and signified is completely arbitrary, in music, while meaning is not immanent in the sound, it is not completely arbitrary.

The tension between the not-quite-arbitrary and the yet-not-immanent in signification through sounds of music may be resolved by the realization that

signification through sounds in music is initiated by the technology of articulation enabled by the material existence of the sound and the human body. It has been established that while, on the level of primary signification, affect and meaning do not constitute a matter of completely free choice, meaning and affect in music are constructed within certain limits of tolerance. While musicology has tended to reduce the multivalent aspects of music to sound, I argue also that it is the *sounds* of music which grasp the body. But while it is the sounds that grip the body, each person in each moment necessarily negotiates the character and the significance of this instance. Shepherd and Wicke sum it up like this: “without sound – no music; without people – no music (175).”

Signification in Music

In order to move this discussion forward, I will need to clarify the difference between primary signification in music, already discussed in this chapter, and secondary and tertiary levels of signification, as well as briefly compare signification in music to signification in language. It is through secondary and tertiary signification that the construction of meaning and affect in music may be connected to the world of particulars—concepts, ideas, objects, people and so on.

Middleton (1999) distinguishes between syntactical and semantic analysis and between primary and secondary signification. While syntactical analysis refers to the ways in which notes relate to one another melodically, harmonically and rhythmically, semantic analysis refers to connotative impressions. (Shepherd and Wicke use Debussy’s

La Mer as an example of a piece of music that customarily evokes the qualities of 'oceanness.') While there is not a complete parallel relationship between syntactical and semantic analysis, on the one hand, and between primary and secondary signification on the other, these processes are closely related. Middleton suggests that “conceptions of primary signification [...] have a common thread: content is defined through its structure, which is closely tied to the syntactic form (1990: 222).”

Primary Signification

A translation process must take place when one uses linguistic semantic analysis to capture processes of signification in music. Middleton points out that in music, for instance, it is rare to find denotation used in the way it is used in linguistics (1999: 220). Exceptions include imitations of extramusical sounds (such as the Beatles' use of animal noises in “Good Morning”). Middleton further notes that there is a “direct and immediate semantic correlation to musical structures (220),” and he quotes Laske (1975: 172, 190):

Semantic knowledge is essentially knowledge concerning the construction of effective representations of some input...the semantic component provides a ‘frame’ within which structures satisfying some interpretation can be elaborated...[Thus] music-semantic properties are the projection, into a musical structure, of sequences of operations underlying its generation and/or recognition.

Although this notion does not rule out ‘meta-musical’ dimensions, they are grounded in a “structural semantics implicated in the musical form itself,” Middleton

concludes (220). This ground level of signification, which in linguistics would be called denotative, Middleton prefers to call *primary signification*.

Middleton opens his discussion of primary signification with a quote from Nicolas Ruwet (1967: 85): “the meaning of music can only become apparent in the description of the music itself.” Middleton lists three processes foundational to primary signification: the effects of words *about* music on its meaning; self-referentiality; and grammar.

The signification of any musical style—ragtime, rock, punk or reggae—is deeply affected, in both journalistic and casual conversation, by the discourse with which it is surrounded. Middleton draws on a theory developed by the French school of experimental music psychology which, although it distinguishes *signification* from *expression*, also argues that they are connected. He suggests that “There is no *direct* link between the verbal signifiers and the musical signifying process; rather, it *passes through*, the verbal signified, and this is why the musical *sens*—auto-reflection and positional value—can give rise to many verbal interpretants (Middleton 221).”

Primary signification *can* be seen as a self-referential act *or* as an act of internal reference. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, whom Middleton considers to have developed the most useful theory of signification in music, quotes Roman Jakobson’s theory of syntagmatic equivalence, which suggests that “rather than alluding to some extrinsic object, music presents itself as *a language which signifies itself* (quoted in Nattiez 1976: 212).” This self-referentiality can also manifest as quotation, as in the Electric Light Orchestra’s version of Chuck Berry’s “Roll Over Beethoven,” or as self-quotation, such as when the Beatles quote their own “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” in “A Day in the Life”

(Middleton 221).⁹⁸ And the sometimes vague reference made when singers pay homage to earlier, definitive performances of a particular piece—for example, it would be difficult to sing “Strange Fruit” without somehow referring to Billie Holiday—also constitutes primary signification, through its ‘referentiality.’

Umberto Eco (1979) proposed a third way of considering music on the level of primary significance (1979: 88-90). In “systems that are purely syntactic and have no apparent semantic depth,” Eco suggests, “the primary signification is, so to speak, grammatical (Middleton 222).” For example, the note C signifies c-ness, but is understood as such only positionally, in relation to other pitches, within scales and functional harmony.

In summary, primary signification in music is purely structural both in terms of syntactic relationship between sonic elements that are recognized as individual elements and in terms of how those individual elements actually occur because they have an internal structure as well (which is clearly what timbre is about). We may view primary signification as purely structural; secondary signification as connotational, and therefore to a degree semantic; finally, when we get into the tertiary level actual objects are involved.

⁹⁸ Middleton also mentions parody (The Beach Boys’ “Surfin’ USA” which imitates Check Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen”) and (less frequent) destructive parody such as Frank Zappa’s work.

Secondary Signification

Secondary signification is referred to in more traditional terminology as connotation, which may arise on the basis of, and is dependent on, any of the primary signification types we have discussed. Middleton, drawing on Gino Stefani (1973: 40-41), provides a list featuring eight different types of secondary signification: for example, *intentional values*, “recognized and intended connotations,” such as a cadence connoting conclusion; *positional implications* arrive at their connotational value from their structural position (for example, the thirty-bar form AABA generates a ‘loop’ effect), while *ideological choices*, “particular, preferred meanings,” are chosen from many possible interpretations (for example, drug-related readings of “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”) (Middleton 232).

It is important to note that the units of primary and secondary signification are not necessarily the same size; the units of secondary signification are generally larger. While one ‘connotator’ on the primary level might be made of several signs, regardless of the size of the connotator, its *content* (that which is connotated) is, in theory, always of infinite size, because the range of its possible associations is endless. In the words of Barthes (1968: 91), “its character is at once general, global and diffuse; it is, if you like, a fragment of ideology.”⁹⁹

Middleton describes three models for the analysis of secondary signification, or connotation: Nattiez’s (1976:157-89), Cooke (1959), and Philip Tagg (1979; 1981). Nattiez suggests three methods: “hermeneutic analysis of the text; reconstitution of the intentions of the producer(s); and experimental testing of listener responses (Nattiez

⁹⁹ I am indebted to Richard Middleton for pointing me to this quote (1999: 233).

1976: 157-89).”¹⁰⁰ Cooke, combining hermeneutics and reconstitution, attempts to create a ‘lexicon’ to account for the meanings of tonal-functional European art music.¹⁰¹ Tagg segments music into musemes and museme compounds. Each museme, with the help of extra-musical cues such as images, texts, and programmatic elements, is examined for similar usages in similar styles of music; and each museme is subject to multiple interpretations. For example, the bass in the *Kojak* theme is interpreted as connoting “intense energy, action and desultory unrest, male-dominated areas of activity, unquiet, aggressiveness, atmosphere of a large North American city, the energetic and somewhat threatening excitement of its subculture (quoted in Middleton 234).” Finally, differing museme interpretations are considered together in terms of their figure/ground relation to one another.

These interpretations refer to social contexts. When there is a strong link between the social structure and the musical structure, how do we avoid falling into the trap of seeing them as *innately* homologous? And if we reject innate homology, then what is the nature of this connection?

Middleton suggests that a number of mechanisms are at play in the connection between social structure and musical structure, and that they are related through “processes of *articulation*.” “The performance constructs social relationships similar to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Middleton found this approach to be limited by several problems: “(a) a naturalistic rather than semiotic approach to acoustic material; (b) too great a reliance on the ostensible content of lyrics; (c) insufficient historical and social differentiation; and (d) a tendency to interpret procedures in isolation rather than in their musical context, where of course, their significance varies according to the structural and functional levels on which they are considered (233).”

those characteristic of the society, and the connotations of the latter fall on the former (Middleton 237).”¹⁰²

In summary, secondary signification is dependent on primary signification. What might seem like an innate homology is often, instead, an instance of music created on an existing model (for example, musical structure’s relation to social structure)¹⁰³.

Connotations arise, in the words of Middleton,

on the basis of the primary level of ‘correspondance’ referred to by Lévi-Strauss, Paget and others. But the whole process is always culturally formed; it is never predetermined. All ‘correspondance’, and their secondary associations, however ‘deep,’ arising through processes of socially directed learning, correlation and comparison. That is to say, all relationships are governed by criteria of *pertinence* (Middleton 239).

This discussion of primary and secondary signification serves as a basis for an approach to understanding the discursive construction of timbre.

Affect and Meaning Through Vocal Timbre

Although the sound of a word, for example “bird,” retains its meaning when sounded in isolation, the sound of a single musical pitch does not. Thus the concept of *medium* is more accurate than the concept of the signifier in the process of understanding the “complex interpenetrative character of auditory events perceived as ‘discrete’ units of

¹⁰² For instance, Alan Lomax’s (1976) work on song structure and its relation to the structure of society may be read as an example of this, and Charles Keil’s analysis of a Bobby Bland concert (1966: 114-142) fits within this analytical framework.

¹⁰³ Middleton suggests that New Orleans open-ended collective improvisation related to the functions of dance and parade, “reflecting the public social life of the socially mixed pre-industrial (mercantile) city” (Middleton 238).

syntax (Shepherd and Wicke 153).” In terms of pitch-units, the timbral dimension of sound does not act in the same way as the linguistic sign which refers, in an arbitrary manner, to an actual phenomenon (such as the sign “bird”, which refers to the concept (bird) in the physical world). Instead, the timbral dimensions of sound act as “matrices of internally structured sounds to evoke states of awareness (Shepherd and Wicke 154-155).” It is these *states of awareness* that are associated with external phenomena. Because each sound is made up of a complex sonic bundle that might *interface differently with different people*, the timbral dimensions of sound cannot act as signifiers (linguistically speaking) (Shepherd and Wicke 155). Therefore,

Elements of signification as articulated through music cannot be grounded *directly* in, or generalized *directly* from, the objects, events, qualities and processes of the material world. If they were, they would act as signifieds in relation to signifiers, and music would be no different from language, which it clearly is. Elements of signification must therefore stand in an *indirect* relationship to these objects, events, qualities and processes if they *are* to be capable of encapsulating the qualities of the *structures* and *states* of the human world: structures and states for which the objects, events, qualities and processes presented by the material world can act only as demarcators and agents of articulation (Shepherd and Wicke 109. Their italics).

Since there is no inherent meaning contained in the sounds in music, but music may evoke a concept such as ‘oceanness’ through connotation (secondary signification) or a feeling by resonating with the “inner structures of life” (primary signification), Shepherd and Wicke reason that the relationship between states of awareness (second-order state of awareness) and sounds in the external world (third-order state of awareness) and the logic and structures of inner life (first-order state of awareness) is

structural. (See Figure 11 from Shepherd and Wicke 157 for this discussion). In fact, they suggest that “this has to be the case if signification is to occur since the meaning of music can never be ‘in’ the medium of its sound (158).” They explain that ‘oceanness’ “is not contained as a meaning ‘in’ the characteristic use of sound in music which gives rise to this concept (connotation), this feeling (*primary* signification).” Rather, “it is evoked in part and indirectly through the sounds’ homologous evocation of the sounds of the sea, which in turn give rise to this in a homologous fashion to the concept of feeling of ‘oceanness’ (158).”

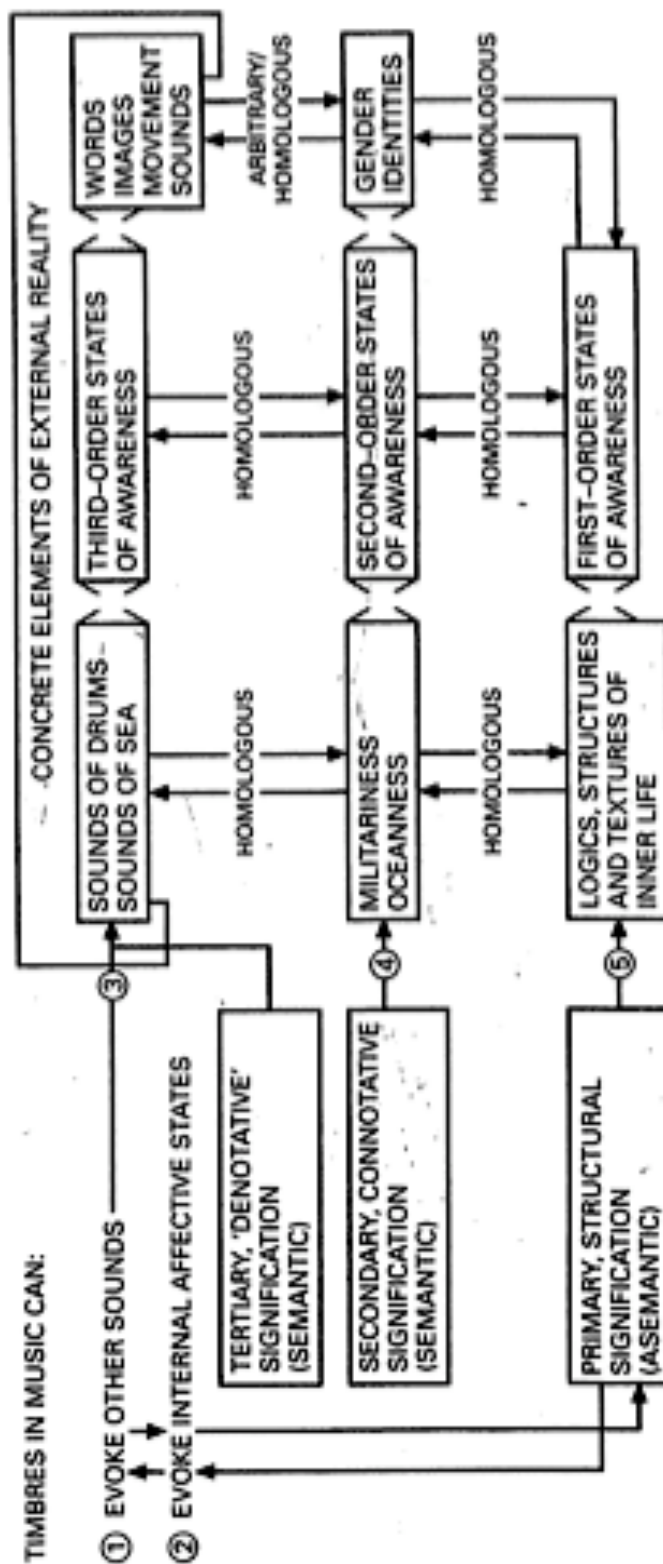


Figure 11 "Matter in Music" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 156

Timbre, or sound bundles, may thus signify in two distinct ways (relating structurally to a different sound or to a non-sonic phenomenon). 1) Timbre may refer to sounds pronounced in the external world. This reference may take place via a direct copy – for example, the use of a military drum roll will invoke the mental concept ‘militariness’ – or via a more symbolic evocation such as the way in which the orchestration in Debussy’s *La Mer* evokes ‘oceanness.’ However, it is crucial to note that the sounds in music, unlike those in language, refer only to phenomena, and not to the concept of any particular phenomenon itself. Therefore, this type of reference might be considered ‘denotative,’ but only mimetically. 2) Some timbres which symbolically evoke various internal states are the core of musical articulation.

The relation between vocal timbre and gender identities becomes an example of this evocation in Shepherd’s 1987 article “Music and Male Hegemony,” which dealt with connections between timbre and gender without the deep theoretical foundation regarding primary, secondary, and tertiary signification subsequently provided in the 1995 work *Music and Cultural Theory*. The problem, however, is that in a crucial part of the discussion in *Music and Cultural Theory* (wherein an understanding of signification beyond concepts such as “militariness” or “oceanness” is established) the authors refer to the previous discussion in the “Music and Male Hegemony” piece, and therefore some crucial arguments necessary to understand signification through the sounds of music are not dealt with in the necessary detail. One of the trickier (and more urgent) questions of the discussion -- whether music is able to signify identities such as gender and, by extension, race, sexuality and so on, and, if so, in which ways – is thus underdeveloped,

as the authors refer the reader to a work that, because it is not based on the same fully-formulated theoretical foundation as is *Music and Cultural Theory*, makes great assumptive leaps. Therefore, while Shepherd and Wicke offer a convincing argument that timbres in music can evoke other sounds and internal affective states, the evocation of identities is not as carefully outlined as is the process of evoking other sounds.

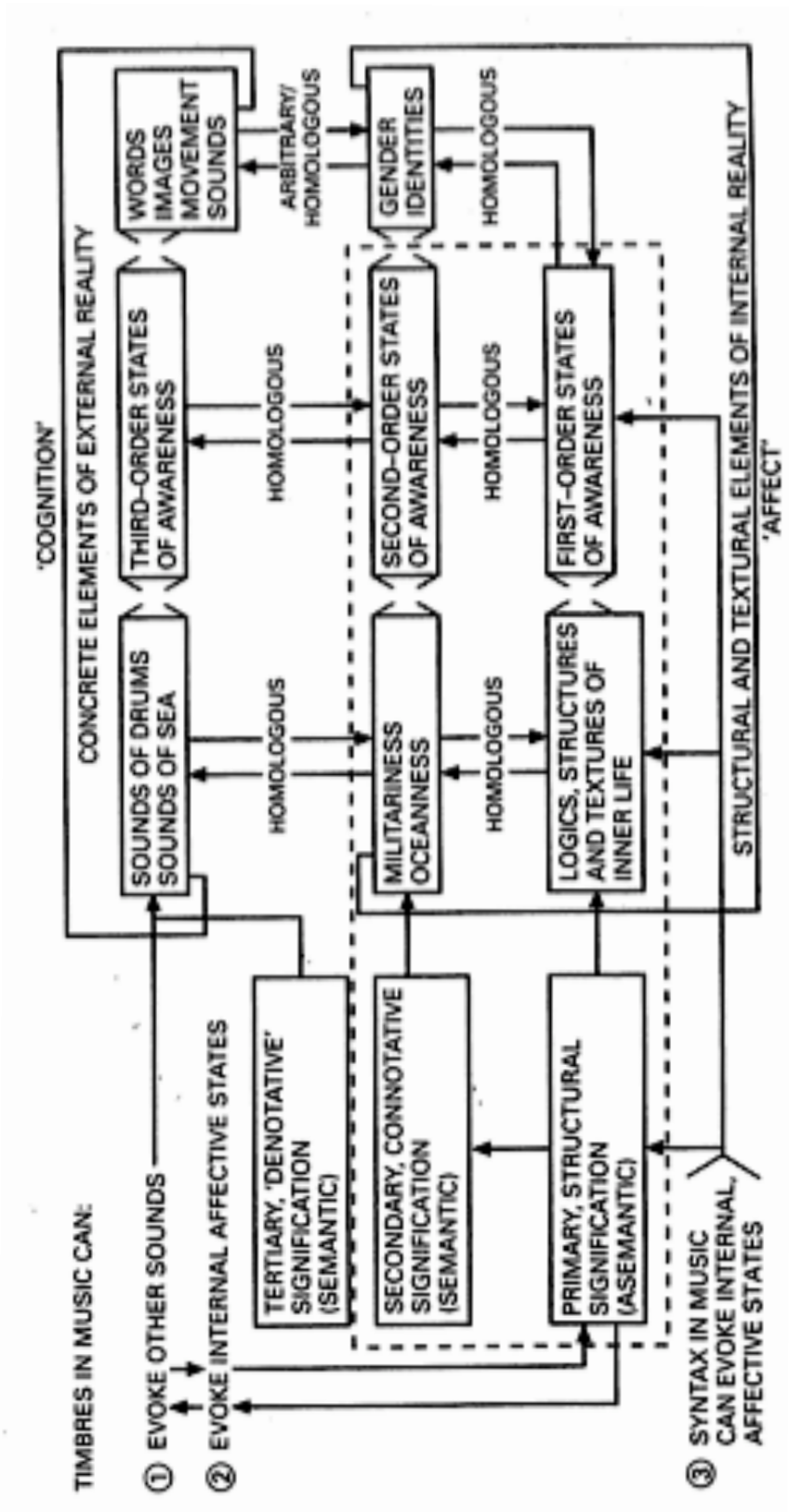


Figure 12 "Syntax and Timbre in Music" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997:164

According to Shepherd and Wicke, timbres in music may evoke three independent levels of signification—primary structural signification (asemantic), secondary connotative signification (semantic), and tertiary, ‘denotative’ signification (semantic)—while at the same time they exist together. The actual timbre of a voice resonating within the listener’s ear and body evokes internal affective states and calls on first order states of awareness. Through that vocal timbre the concept of blackness might be evoked, calling on second-order states of awareness. The construct of blackness might call on words, images, movements, or sounds as “concrete elements of external reality (Shepherd and Wicke 156)” and, for example, evoke images such as a robe used in an African-American gospel choir. Or timbres in music may simply evoke other sounds. For example, the timbre of an oboe can evoke a kazoo (tertiary signification), which can evoke the concept of clownness (secondary signification) which in turn can evoke “logic, structure and textures of inner life (157),” or the experience of clownness as sadness or loss (primary signification).

The “logic, structure and textures of inner life” constitute an important concept for Shepherd and Wicke’s theory of signification through structural connection. It seems to me that the term, however, is not precisely defined; the reader must therefore accept this model of syntax and timbre on intuitive grounds. My theory of this concept provides one of the key pieces in the development of a model for theorizing affect and meaning through timbre, and will, I believe, ground an understanding of evocations and readings of identities such as gender or race. This theory and its implications will largely be spelled out in chapter 8.

Signification: A Performative Articulation

[A]s corporeally and somatically manifest, music is both structured and structuring. As such, it resonates powerfully within the lived, corporeal and somatic experience of the listener. To hear a voice, a musical sound, is to 'have knowledge' of the corporeal and somatic state which produced it. (Shepherd and Wicke 180)

Music is realized through the corporeal and the somatic. Therefore the body—not only the body of the instrumentalist, vocalist, or producer, but also the body of the listener—plays a key role in the processes of manifestation of affect and meaning through the sounds of music. Articulation—the active *interaction*—is released through music as a medium of sound. It is within this process that music manifests simultaneously in two dimensions—the sonic saddle and the elements of signification—which continuously unfold. The articulation of affect *through the human body* is the critical point in this process.

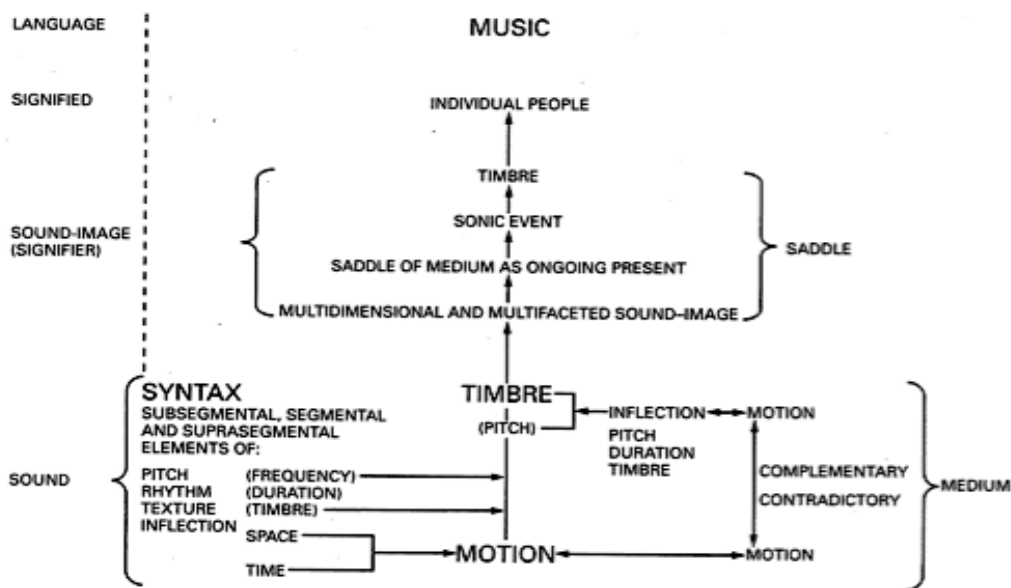


Figure 13 "The Medium and the Saddle" from Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 166

In the unfolding of the technology of articulation, meaning and affect in music are realized and, one might argue, released. While *active* performance is the basis from which the listening process is launched, I argue that beyond music as a performative semiological model—“performative” referring to active (as in “articulation,” a word Shepherd and Wicke often use to elucidate the interconnected process of interpellation of the internal and external world) participation rather than to passive reception—the term “performative” conveys the necessity for an active *construction* to take place in order to come to an understanding of affect and meaning in music.

The term “performative” conveys the necessity for an active *construction* to take place in order to come to an understanding of affect and meaning in music. Thus, while I will maintain Shepherd and Wicke’s definition of “performative” as *active*, I will also develop, in chapter 6 (in light of perspectives offered by Erving Goffmann, J.L. Austin, Judith Butler, Suzanne Cusick, and Jose Esteban Muñoz), the notion of the performative as a theory of identity actively performed—presented and constructed—through timbre.

The notion of active participation in the construction of meaning and affect through the medium of music has consequences for any re-examination of what Shepherd has identified as the “standardization” of timbre in tonal harmony and the consequent perception of timbre as “pure” and “transparent” (Shepherd 1991: 152-73). In chapter 6 I suggest that in discourses around Western art music performances, and popular music forms and performances (which in many ways are constructed on and analyzed with the aid of terms and concepts from Western art music), the lack of a nuanced and effective vocabulary for understanding timbre has been a contributing factor to the state of affairs which has permitted, and perhaps encouraged, the unconscious reproduction of

culturally fixed ideas of timbre to collapse under a reading of the (racialized) human body. Due to a lack of words and concepts that directly address timbre and concepts of timbre, demonstrations of nuanced music making with great timbral range have been mistaken for evidence for and confirmation of immanent racial differences.

In this chapter I have argued that in the relationship between the sounds of music and somatically grounded affective states, meaning and affect are the results of a social process involving sounds as a medium and human beings. That is, the sounds of music, in general, and timbre, in particular, articulate affect through the human body.

Chapter 5

(Vocal) Timbre in a Historical and Perceptual Perspective

Your voice has another timbre than that hard, deep organ of Miss Mann's.

Charlotte Brontë

Can it really be that we hear three sounds every time we hear one? Nobody before M. Rameau has ever noticed such a thing. It must be a phenomenon which does not exist in nature [...] it is therefore neither widespread or real; it exists only for M. Rameau and a few equally scholarly ears.

E.C. Fréron¹⁰⁴

What do the Ngoni people find beautiful in their music if a person is singing with a screaming voice? If I am listening with a Haydn or Mozart ear the intonation is out, *the tone is out*, but if I am listening with an *isicathamiya*¹⁰⁵ ear this is expressive.

Bongani Mthethwa¹⁰⁶

Introduction

The first epigraph above, quoted from the mid-19th century novel by Charlotte Brontë, exemplifies an early use of the term *timbre* in its modern sense. Direct dealings with timbre as we conceive of it today—timbre as the perceptual *quality* of sound¹⁰⁷—

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Jacopi, Vol. III, p. XLVII. Fales (2005: 2).

¹⁰⁵ *Isicathamiya* is the singing style that was introduced to a world-wide audience by the South African vocal group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, through their recording and performance collaboration with Paul Simon, “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” (written by Solomon Linda and The Evening Birds).

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Lucia (1986) 163. Italics added.

¹⁰⁷ According to Puterbaugh (1999) writers who define timbre as a quality or characteristic of tone include Diderot and D’Alembert (1758), Zahm (1900), Sir Jean James (1968), Seashore (1938), Bartholomew (1942), Licklider (1951), Olson (1952), Groves (1952), *Encyclopedia de la musique* (1958), Backus (1969), Wedin and Goude (1972), Howe (1975), Plomp (1976), Wessel (1979), Groves (1980), Campbell and Greated (1987), OED (1991).

were almost entirely absent in literature about Western music until the early Romantic period, with the exception of tangential descriptions related to performance technique. In *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgment from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*, Charles Burnett, writing about listening in the middle ages, states that the perception of two different sounds was attributed to differences in pitch rather than differences in quality (1991: 48). To describe differences in quality, medieval listeners were forced to invoke analogies to other senses because, as translator Dominicus Gundissalinus notes, different sounds “had no names of their own but borrow them from qualities of other senses (quoted in Burnett 1991: 63).” In a chapter devoted to “differences of sound,” Jacques de Liège, in a philosophical discussion regarding sound, points out that two notes sounded together in unison can indeed be ‘different sound (Burnett 1991: 63).’ In these examples timbre, as we think of it today, is not addressed directly; rather, the phenomenon of tone quality is observed and addressed obliquely. The first noted use of the word *timbre* is found at the end of the 14th century: “There was flu many a tymbre bete. And many a maide carolende (OED 1971: 37).”

Not only has timbre, in general, often been interpreted under different umbrella concepts such as pitch, source etc., but *vocal* timbre, in specific, has faced another hurdle. Earl Veitlman has pointed out that (ethno-)musicological and anthropological inquiries into the voice have focused almost exclusively on what the voice says, evidencing strong phonocentric listening. This dissertation is concerned not with what words say, but with what the sound of the voice conveys. To that end, this chapter examines the emergence of an understanding of timbre within Western classical music traditions from a historical

perspective, and interrogates contemporary insights into human perceptions of sound and timbre.

I would like to preface this chapter by noting that to this day there is not much written about timbre, compared to writing on other elements of music (e.g. pitch, harmony, rhythm, and form). Older sources mention a concept (even though the term timbre is not used) that might be traced back to Aristotle. Although Aristotle writes that the opposites that can be observed in hearing have to do with pitch, he also writes about the “greatness or smallness, and smoothness and roughness of the voice (Burnett 1991: 63).”¹⁰⁸ One of the main Aristotle interpreters, the Persian Abu Ali Sina (980-1037, writing under the Latin name Avicenna), proposed that the sound of the voice could be “weak and strong, hard and soft, spread out and condensed (Burnett 1991:63).”¹⁰⁹ As sound was conceived in terms of the five senses, it was discussed in the fields of philosophy and medicine. Later, in medieval European music theory, Jacques de Liège’s *Speculum musicae* (c. 1320) included a chapter that addressed sound, voice and the differences between sounds, along with hearing and the judgment of senses (Burnett 1991: 46).¹¹⁰

The sources I will deal with in this chapter begin with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as his encyclopedia entry on sound is one of the first formal writings on timbre. Timbral speculations have largely emerged from two sources: scientific enquiries, and writings for

¹⁰⁸ From Aristotle. *De anima*, 422^b24.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Burnett notes that the Latin translation has slightly different sets of opposites: ‘auditus apprehendit contrarietatem quae est inter sonum acutum et gravem, et contrarietatem quae est inter debilem et fortem, et contrarietatem quae est inter durum et lenem et asperum et ceteros’ (Burnett 63, note 150).

¹¹⁰ In the middle ages the term ‘sound’ referred to pure pitch, while the term ‘voice’ was used to describe the quality of the sound of that pure pitch as it was shaped in the production of a ‘voice,’ or a sound quality that was particularly soulful (Burnett 46).

and by composers. Newer writings may be seen on the science of sound, psychoacoustics and music psychology. In the former area the nature of sound and timbre is studied for the purpose for developing knowledge for computer processing of sound, or instrumental sonic analysis, and composition; and in the latter area our perception of timbre is studied in order to understand how we read our environment in sonic terms. However, studies of timbre in music cognition are meager compared to its focus on pitch and rhythm (Halpern 2007: 35). Outside of these areas the literature is even scarcer. Thus, while it might seem that the sources I draw upon are limited, in actuality they are representative of current research in ethnomusicology and musicology. In ethnomusicology Cornelia Fales is arguably the most avid theorist on timbre, while Grant Olwage (2004), Steven Feld (1990, 1994, 2003), Aaron A. Fox (2004), Thomas Porcello (2005), and David Samuels (2004) also address issues of timbre. In popular music studies/cultural studies, writers on timbre include Mike Daley (1997), Stan Hawkins (1996), Richard Middleton (1990), Frans Mossberg (2002, 2005), John Shepherd and Peter Wicke (1997), and Peter Wicke. In the field of sound theory, or the study of timbre for the purpose of composition, Robert Erickson (1975), Wayne Slawson (1985), Robert Cogan (1984) and Cogan and Pozzi Escot (1976), John Laver (1991), David Ehresman and David Wessel (1978), and John Putenbaugh (1999) have been active researchers and writers.

So far in this dissertation I have addressed timbre in relation to questions of race, ethnicity, and meaning drawn from the sounds of music. As a chief aim of this work is to contribute to the analysis of timbre, it is important to situate its study historically and theoretically.

I. A Historical Perspective on the Emergence of the Perception of Overtones and Timbre in Western Classical Music

The “Discovery” of Overtones and Emerging Consciousness of Timbre

Although Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1765) is generally considered to have been the first theorist to extensively investigate the parameters beyond pitch and dynamics which distinguish one sound from another, we read in the 1752 *Dictionnaire de Trevoux*: “One says that the timbre is shrill not merely that the timbre of a sound is shrill (quoted in Fales 2005: 4).” and Diderot and D’Alambert posited in their 1758 *Encyclopédie* that the function of timbre was to “differentiate types of sounds.”¹¹¹ Rousseau’s entries on sound in the 1765 *Encyclopédie* (Volume XV) and the 1778 *Dictionnaire de Musique* constitute some of the first formal writings on timbre (as we define it today) within Western classical music.¹¹² In the 1765 entry Rousseau speculates on what distinguishes one sound from another:

it is evident that it results neither from the degree of lowness [pitch], nor even from that of loudness. An oboe will in vain be put exactly in unison with a flute, it will be useless to reduce the sound to the same degree, the sound of the flute will always have a *je ne sais quoi* of softness and mellowness, that of the oboe *je ne sais quoi* of dryness and bitterness, which prevents one from ever confusing them. However, no one that I know has ever examined this part, which perhaps, as much as the others, is found to have its difficulties: for the quality of timbre depends neither on the number of vibrations which make the degree of loud and soft. It will be necessary therefore to find in the *corps sonore* a third modification different from these two to explain this last property; a project which

¹¹¹ Both quotes found in John Puterbaugh’s timbre timeline (1999: 147-154).

¹¹² The term *timbre* was used to describe aspects of pre-existing *opera comique* from folkloric traditions, 16th and 17th century chansons, and Vaudeville tunes. Much earlier, the term was used in medieval times for music-analytical purposes. “*Timbres grégoriens*” were used to describe stereotypical melodies and rhythmic patterns in plain chant melodies (Emerson, *Grove Music Online*. Accessed August 28, 2007).

which doesn't seem to me too easy a thing... (XV: 346. Quoted in Fales 2005:4).

In the 1778 entry Rousseau defines “tymbre” as that “quality of sound is “sharp” or “sweet,” “soft” or “brilliant (quoted in Puterbaugh 147).”

From these earliest definitions of timbre we may see two main explanations emerge: 1) timbre allows us to distinguish between two sound sources with the same pitch, and 2) a conventional use of adjectives in describing the identity of particular timbres assigned value to timbres along the same value scale determined linguistically.¹¹³

Rousseau's attempt to define timbre was not the first. Cornelia Fales, in her work on perceptions of timbre during the French Enlightenment,¹¹⁴ proposes that earlier theorists and writers discussed timbre in their studies of overtones and theories of unison and consonance in harmony, but that they possessed neither the perceptual structures nor the language with which to consider the modern concept of timbre. For example, in 1716 Philippe de la Hire attempted to describe an aspect of sound of which he had clear experience, but no language to capture:

One must distinguish the sound which is formed by the encounter of two sonorous bodies which clash from the pitch that it has in comparison to another pitch of the same nature.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Charles Burnett (1991: 63) remarks that the differences noted in vocal sounds in the Middle Ages were probably influenced by rhetorical theory.

¹¹⁴ Most of the quotes from this section are taken from Fales' "Listening to Timbre During the French Enlightenment" (2005). Fales's main point is that overtones were often not heard as overtones, or "delicate sounds," because listeners perceived them instead as changes in pitch or loudness. Fales also argues that Mersenne and Rameau, although they did not possess adequate language to address the role of overtones in timbre, *did* have a sense of the importance of auditory perception and auditory flexibility. I argue that these discussions of overtones during the French Enlightenment illustrate the degree to which listeners' *perceptual* framework enables or disables hearing.

¹¹⁵ "On doit distinguer le Son que se forme par la rencontre de deux corps sonores qui se choquent d'avec le ton qu'il a en le comprant à un autre ton de la meme nature." Quoted in Fales (2005: 1).

Fales (2005:2) suggests that when listeners consciously reflected on sound, parameters of timbre were conflated with parameters or qualities such as pitch, dynamic, identity of sound source and so on. Fales makes two important points:

- 1) Because the parameters of timbre lacked a descriptive vocabulary, people also lacked a means of appraising timbre. And because what we conceive as timbre today was only vaguely distinguished from other sensations, discussions of *overtones* and *consonance* afforded 18th century music theorists an important jumping-off point in approaching timbre.
- 2) Because Enlightenment thinkers became aware of overtones before timbre, they had to come to terms with the notion of variable listening before they could accept and thus discover the relation between overtones and timbre (Fales 2005: 2).

The notion that the listener must be intellectually “in tune” with what she hears before she can hear it is of particular concern for this study, and will be elaborated throughout the chapter. If listeners are intellectually and perceptually comfortable with a historically and culturally contingent phenomenon (for example, that race matters and is evidenced in differing physiques and voices), they will be able to perceive it. The following quote from Diderot (1778) on acoustics indicates the enormous insecurity and confusion that appears when someone hears something, such as overtones, that are believed not to exist.¹¹⁶

Whom will I take as a guide? Whom can I rely on? On you? On myself? It is on him who, well informed as to the location of the object [of

¹¹⁶ The existence of overtones was formally introduced to Paris intellectuals in a presentation by Joseph Sauveur at the *Académie Royale des Sciences* in March of 1701. In this presentation, the existence of overtones was formally documented (Fales 2005: 2).

perception] is unlikely to deceive himself as to its nature; one, who has a pure ear, who enjoys a healthy mind, in which the image of objects is not defigured by his sense (quoted in Fales 2005:2).

Others believed outright that the whole *sans delicats* or “little sounds” idea was a massive hoax. They claimed that neither before nor after Sauveur’s discovery had they heard the small sounds. Critic E.C. Fréron was one who believed that Rameau had concocted the whole thing, and was not to about be fooled:

Can it really be that we hear three sounds every time we hear one? Nobody before M. Rameau has ever noticed such a thing. It must be a phenomenon which does not exist in nature except for in the ears of musicians...it is therefore neither widespread nor real; it exists only for M. Rameau and a few equally scholarly ears... (Quoted in Fales, 2005, 2).¹¹⁷

Although Fréron *ironically* located this “phenomenon” in the realm of the psychological, his comment does point to the site where the overtone-hearing leap must take place. The leap is in the mind that allows the ear to hear; the leap *enables* the mind to trust and believe in what it hears. Mariene Mersenne, in a series of exercises designed to develop the perception of overtones, makes a similar observation about the *mental* shift that must take place:

Now it is necessary to choose a great silence to perceive them, even though it is no longer necessary when one has an accustomed ear: and if the musician don’t hear them as soon as they touch some chord or flute, or a viol, or of another instrument, as happens to many players of lute, who are so expectant of and preoccupied with the natural sound of the strings, that there is (it seems) no more places in their common sense, or in *their*

¹¹⁷ Rameau believed passionately in the concept of overtones, and was designing experiments that would teach him more about them.

imagination to receive the idea or the species of these small delicate sounds, it is necessary that they *have patience*, or that they *make themselves greatly attentive*, for it is difficult for them to play so delicate with the bow, that they hear several sounds at the same time. (Quoted in Fales, 2005: 5).

It is noteworthy that Mersenne, in attempting to explain why the musician might not instantly hear the “delicate sounds,” addresses the lutenist’s inattentive or unreceptive mind rather than his difficulty in hearing or his incapable ears. Fales also points out that whereas most discussions from this era were focused on the overtones and the question of their volume, Mersenne shifted the focus purely to the listener. Rameau, perhaps even more than Mersenne, addressed the necessity to sensitize the listener’s *mind*. While others attempted to optimize the acoustic environment, Rameau’s writing tried to open the ears of his readers by *preparing their minds*:

...imagine to himself the fifth or the major third of the dominant sound in order to dispose the ear to sense these consonance in their unison, or in their octave with which the ear resonates...The more one has an ear experienced in harmony, the more one is capable of distinguishing the different sounds in question, not only in the resonance of a string, but also in that of all other resonant bodies, even of the voice...: however, as these sounds are found to be extremely weak in comparison to that of the total body, one can imagine its unisons and octaves to oneself; a means of perception that is natural in regard to the most commensurable [with the larges aliquote [sic] in common] sounds, and which greatly facilitates the operation, without making one suspect artifice, since to dissuade oneself, one need only imagine for a moment other intervals than those in question; one imagines them in vain, one can not distinguish them any more for all of that. (Quoted in Fales, 2005:5).

These discussions, read in light of current knowledge about overtones and timbre, strongly illustrate the notion that language and beliefs about experiential possibilities shape what we hear or do not hear as much as, if not *more* than, do acoustic

circumstances. The listener's active participation in the hearing process, and the ways in which language and the *belief* in perceptual phenomena shape our hearing, are at the center of this chapter.

Timbre as Measurable Object

The French Enlightenment gave rise to two discourses on the topic of timbre. The first located the possibility of hearing overtones in acoustical conditions (i.e. if they exist, we will hear overtones). The second discourse invoked a shift in perception (i.e. in order to hear overtones, the listener must simply listen intently and openly). In subsequent writing on timbre, this discussion comes to be concerned with its objective study. By 1817 a clearer understanding of the science of overtones and sound had emerged. Biot writes,

All sonorous bodies yield simultaneously an infinite number of sounds of gradually decreasing intensity. The phenomenon is similar to that which obtains for the harmonics of strings; but the law for the series of harmonics is different for bodies of different forms. May it not be this difference which produce the particular character of sound called timbre, which distinguishes each form of body and which causes the sound of a string (quoted in Puterbaugh 1999: 147).

Most of the definitions of timbre that emerged throughout the 19th century were reasonably close to Sir Jean James' 1937 definition: "by timbre is meant the distinguishing or characteristic quality of sound." This type of definition referred, to a

greater or lesser degree, to the physical components that enabled differentiation between two discrete sound sources. Olson's definition from 1952 is exemplary:

Timbre may be said to be the characteristic which enables the listener to recognize the kind of musical instrument which produces the tone. There are six physical characteristics which determine the quality, namely: (i) the number of partials, (ii) the distribution of the partials, (iii) the relative intensity of the partials, (iv) the inharmonic partials, (v) the fundamental tone (vi) the total intensity.

The timbre-as-measurable-object stance would seem to indicate that the language describing timbre compromised the legitimacy of the concept, and even possibly of musical analysis of the parameter. J.K. Randall, for example, wrote:

I would hope that we could soon find whatever further excuse we still need to quite [sic] talking about mellow timbres and edgy timbre and timbres altogether, in favor of contextual musical analysis of developing structures of vibrato, tremolo, spectral transformation, and all these various dimensions of sounds which need no longer languish as inmates of some metaphor (J.K. Randall 1967).

Clearly, Randall did not believe that the concept of timbre addressed any issue of serious concern to music analysis, or to the processes of understanding music.

Only in texts from as late as 1972 do we again observe descriptions of the timbral phenomenon that consider its central component to be the *attitude* of listening. Lage Wedin suggests that timbre encompasses both the physical characteristics of the sound and a psychological component, which deals "with descriptions proceeding from the listener's experience (Wedin and Goude 1972)." R. Plomp, ten years later, writes: "Timbre is an attribute of the subjective experience of musical tones," providing us with an explanation similar to Wedin's. "Timbre is coded as the function of the sound source

or of the meaning of the sound,” Plomp elaborates, and continues, “Sounds cannot be ordered on a single scale with respect to timbre. Timbre is a multidimensional attribute of the perception of sounds.” Dowling and Harwood describe the same phenomenon in a more cynical manner: “Timbre is the miscellaneous category for describing the psychological attributes of sound, gathering into one bundle whatever was left over after pitch, loudness, and duration had been accounted for (1986).” And Bregman declares “Until such time as the dimension of timbre are clarified it is better to drop the term timbre (Bregman 1990).”¹¹⁸

Indeed, the characteristics of timbres result from various combinations of “temporal envelop, rate and depth of amplitude and frequency modulation, and degree of its partials (Houtsma 1989),” but the ways in which we experience these timbres, the ways we perceive and interpret timbres, are framed by our subjective experiences. John Hajda’s definition—“Timbre is not a thing. It is an abstraction. Timbre is not an object. It does not exist in the real world as an object (Hajda 1997)” —explains the relationship between physical sounds and minds. And Stephan Malloch clarifies the listener’s role in identifying timbre: “it is to [assign] an identity to sound” (1997). Thus, these researchers are pointing towards the emergence of timbre to form in a tandem of sound and listener.

¹¹⁸ These quotes are taken from Puterbaugh’s “Timbre Timeline” Appendix to 1999. Also available <http://silvertone.princeton.edu/~john/timbretimeline.htm>

Performative Listening

We have observed the *leap of faith*, the mental and perceptual shift required to begin hearing overtones during the French Enlightenment. In Rameau's and Mersenne's essays we found choreographed lessons in listening. Recall that Mersenne instructed his listeners to find a place in "their imagination to receive the idea or the species of these small delicate sounds." Rameau's prescription for discovering overtones is not unlike a choreographed dance with the organ:

Take the organ stop called Bourdon, Prestan or Flute, Nazard and Tierce...Press one key while only the Bourdon is sounding, and pull successively each one of the other stops: you will hear their sounds mix together successively one with the others. You will likewise be able to distinguish one from the other while they are together; but if, to distract yourself from it, you improvise a moment on the same key as before, you will believe that you distinguish no more than a single sound, which will be that of the Bourdon, the lowest of all, the fundamental, the one that corresponds to the sound of the total [resonating] body. (Quoted in Fales 4)

The listening body was asked to follow instructions on positioning in relation to the instrument, while simultaneously the listening mind was asked to listen for what it did not believe existed. The power of *performance*, of directed bodies, of the positioning of the body and the mind offering access to previously unknown registers of experience enabled people to begin to hearing what they had never heard before. What we hear is not necessarily about the *sound*; rather, it is about what we *believe to be sounded*. Recall Fréron's suspicion: "It [overtones] must be a phenomenon which does not exist in nature except for the ears of musicians, it is therefore neither widespread nor real." Fréron's comment was ironic and mean-spirited, and although we know today that overtones do

exist, his statement was also quite accurate. The perceived sound composed by all the frequencies that makes up a note as we hear it are created *in and by the performative state of the listener*.

The balance between the basal human instinct towards identifying the source of a sound and the equally strong instinct toward achieving equilibrium between the perceived source and the emitted sound is not a passive reception of a closed sound. Rather, it is a state in which the active participation of the listener is fundamental to the end result. It is to the investigation of this performative state of listening I will now turn, addressing it from contemporary perspectives on sound and perception.

II. Perceiving Timbre

The relationship between overtones and timbre

Before we proceed, I would like to offer contemporary definitions of the terms timbre and harmonics. Today *timbre* is commonly defined as 1) the distinguishing sonic quality of an instrument or sound source (i.e. what characterizes the sound of a violin compared to that of a cello, when playing the same pitch); and 2) the multitude of sound qualities with which an instrument can play each pitch (i.e. dark tone versus bright tone).¹¹⁹ The relationship between harmonics and timbre was cloudy for eighteenth century theorists. A *harmonic* is defined (as a noun) as one of, in theory, an infinite

¹¹⁹ In both cases timbre is in part produced by the instrumental tone's relative amplitude.

number of frequencies produced by a single sound source. Each harmonic's cycles per second (frequency) is a multiple of the fundamental frequency,¹²⁰ and (as an adjective) as the quality of a harmonic in "harmonic relation," that is, a harmonic whose frequency is multipliable with the frequencies of other harmonics, which are, again, in a harmonic relationship with the fundamental frequency. For instance, the harmonic with a frequency of 1000 Hz is in a harmonic relationship with the frequencies of 200 Hz, 300 Hz, 400 Hz, and these are all harmonics of the fundamental frequency 100Hz.¹²¹ Another way to parse the different parameters of sound, and to separate timbre from other parameters, is to distinguish between what a sound *does* (its pitch and loudness), and what a sound *is* (its timbre) (Fales 2002: 58).¹²² "*Timbre* refers to the perceptual quality of sounds," John Putenbaugh writes, and continues, "Timbre is then not an inherent component of a sound, but rather, as an overall quality it is an attribute of sensation (1999: 1)."

Discrepancy between the Sound in the Acoustic World and the Perceived World

Instead of being identified as one of the four parameters of sound, timbre is often directly identified with its source. Rather than describing the timbral features that remind the listener of the sound that is classified as a mezzo-soprano voice, a typical example of

¹²⁰ For an in-depth summary of discussion in a historical perspective of the relationship between harmonics, formants, temporal characteristics, amplitude and frequency modulation and timbre, please see Putenbaugh (1999: 6-23).

¹²¹ This discussion is based on Fales' "Sound: A Simple Introduction to its production, perception, and representation." <http://www.indiana.edu/~savail/workingpapers/sound.html> Accessed December 1, 2006.

¹²² Robert Erickson defined timbre as follows: "Timbre is that attribute of sensation in terms of which a listener can judge that two sounds having the same loudness and pitch are dissimilar" (Erickson 1976: 4).

this phenomena is to identify a sound *as* a mezzo-soprano voice. The timbre and the identification of the source of the sound are so intimately tied together that the former is often subsumed, perceptively, within the latter. If we can so easily distinguish one instrument from another, how can our sense of timbre be so much part of our unconscious perception?

Cornelia Fales (2002) has attempted to answer this question. Distinguishing between the *acoustic world* (the physical environment where the acoustic signal is produced and projected) and the *perceived world* (the subjective world of the listener in which the acoustic signal is translated by the listener), Fales facilitates a distinction between the acoustic signal and the sonic world the listener experiences. Because a given acoustic signal might not excite the same percept in all listeners within or across historical and cultural contexts, there is a discrepancy between the *acoustic signal* and the *listener's sonic world*. In fact, Fales claims that “auditory perception more often than not depends on factors external to—sometimes in contradiction to—the acoustic stimulus that provokes it (Fales 61).”

A central function of timbre is to provide the listener with information about his or her environment. Our lives are therefore (to a much lesser extent now than earlier in human history) dependent on our sense and reading of sound in general and timbre in specific. Ironically, that same survival-based dependency on information gained from sound has distorted our perceptions of the acoustic accuracy of the nature of sound and sound sources. Imagine hearing a performer on a concert stage: although the performer's sound bounces into our ears from all surrounding surfaces and therefore reaches to us from many directions, an acoustic illusion causes us to sense that the sound is emitted

directly by the source on the stage, and therefore from one direction only. Although timbre is the parameter that offers the most information about directionality and about the environment through which the sound has traveled, we also make instant modifications to accommodate for what we need to hear to keep safe. For example, if we hear the sound of something dangerous approaching, we block out the directional information given to us by the bouncing of sound from various surfaces, and again perceive the sound as coming to us from the sound source, and are therefore able to locate the potential danger.

In the broader context of listening, perception aims to identify the source of the sound. In fact, one of the main goals of listening is to maintain, in the words of Fales, an “identity relationship between acoustic source and perceived source (61).” The auditory cortex carries out most of the lower-level (as well as higher-level) processing of complex sound using hardwired information about the sound’s behavior in the physical world. It seems, therefore, that the auditory world of a normal listener is based in a canonical knowledge of sound and its source. This knowledge has largely to do with issues of timbre (Fales 61).

Theoretically, all the information needed to determine pitch and loudness is recorded even *before* the sound has left the inner ear. The identification of timbre, however, must wait until all of the sonic elements reach the auditory cortex, where they are grouped. A generally accepted thesis about the brain’s organizational strategy is termed, by Bregman (1994), heuristics—competing clues or hypotheses regarding possible groupings—based largely on characteristics of source behavior. The clues that point to the most likely source will be used to organize the set of stimuli into auditory percepts. Timbre is one of the primary results of this grouping. In other words, the

auditory cortex is charged with the enormous task of grouping, according to sources (which are characterized not by unified information but by a mixture of elements), an enormous number of individual sonic elements. Each group is identified as one perceptual unit according to its *mixture* of elements. Therefore, even though, theoretically, all the information needed to grasp pitch and loudness—both major components of timbre—is available *before* the sound has left the inner ear, only the naming of timbre must wait until it reaches the auditory cortex. There all of the elements are grouped, and undergo the process of perceptual fusion that causes us to experience the sound as a unitary sensation: tone quality of timbre. Fales writes:

Since the perceived timbre of a steady-state tone is determined largely by the relative amplitudes of its constituent frequencies, there is no single property or component of an acoustic signal that corresponds to that sensation; thus, *perceived timbre exists in a very real sense only in the mind of the listener, not in the objective world* (62. Italics added).

Equilibrium of the Listener and Perceptualization of Sound

Although it is obviously an essential goal for a listener to identify the source of a given sound, her perceptual equilibrium is also very important to maintain. Identification of a sound source using human hearing (as current research understand human hearing) is based on incomplete information. Experiments, such as Richard Warren's (1976), show that the consistency of the perceived information is so crucial to listener equilibrium that in order to maintain it listeners will, for example, report hearing pieces of acoustic patterns that are missing. Correspondingly, when presented with conflicting pairs of

visual and auditory stimuli, listeners unconsciously select parts of the aural and visual elements in order to form a percept in which they can believe with no conflict. McGurk and MacDonald's (1976) experiment evidences that the visual elements play a stronger, framing role.¹²³ As listeners we are confident in our auditory accuracy. Our listening is so strongly source-oriented that the fundamental premise of our auditory logic is *projected* onto data rather than interpreted from it. Not only do we say that we hear a piano, rather than hearing a sound that may indicate that a piano is being played, we also project our emotional reaction to a particular sound when we for example hear a "joyful" flute. Fales notes that "[o]ur entire auditory world, it seems, is based on the substitution of the indexed for the indexical and the effect for the cause (2002: 63)."

Timbre is the parameter that is most highly perceptualized. This is probably due first and foremost to the fact that as a "perceived quality," in the words of Fales, "it is *already* the most perceptualized (her italics. 2002: 63)." Secondly, timbre is the parameter that carries the most information regarding a sound's source, and we recall that the listener compensates for inconsistencies between the perceived source and the sonic information she receives. Thirdly, the reading and interpretation of timbre takes place largely unconsciously, and thus the process of perceptualization is the least visible.

Perceptualization works in two different ways. 1) If a listener is presented with a degraded or incomplete signal, she automatically fills in or restores the "missing" elements (Warren 1976) and; 2) as an efficiency mechanism, a listener shuts out—does not hear—some continuous environmental sounds, such as the buzzing of neon lights or

¹²³ When listeners are presented with an audio recording of the letter [d] combined with a video recording of a person pronouncing the letter [b], listeners, without indecision and without demonstrating an awareness of the complex selective process they undertake, report that they hear the letter [b].

the hum from a nearby refrigerator. These are eliminated as percepts. In summary, in order to create a coherent environment listeners concoct or fail to perceive certain sounds. Recent brain lateralization research (Liegeois-Chauvel et al. 1998; Peretz 1988) has concluded that listening to music is even more flexible (the listener is more flexible) than is listening to speech or certain environmental sounds.

Timbre Manipulation

Fales writes in more detail about the phenomena of timbre manipulation in music—*timbre anomaly* and *timbre juxtaposition*—in “The Paradox of Timbre” (Fales 2002: 65-75). She divides timbre extraction into two techniques: *timbre anomaly by extraction* (exemplified by overtone singing) and *timbre anomaly by redistribution* (exemplified by Ghanaian balophone, or the bell tone in barbershop singing, each the result of the blending of overtones from different singers). Timbre anomaly by redistribution produces a percept made up of components from different sources, and the result is the perception of sounds in non-source mode (i.e., the sounds exist only in the perceived world, and not in the acoustic world). Bregman (1994) called these sounds “chimeric.” In timbre juxtaposition, formanted and harmonically based timbres are placed side by side (Fales 76).

The phenomena examined in this dissertation belong to the category of timbre anomaly by redistribution. It is important to note that this kind of listening is concentrated on making sense of the world—that is, on making sense of the source of

each sound as it fits into the ideologically-informed acoustic world of the listener. The (visual) color line—as identified by W.E.B. Bois in 1881 (1903)—thus becomes a constitutive aspect of the source material that informs the perception of sound. This process results in what Fales has called the “perception of sourceless sound (76).” Therefore, instead of hearing tones that are not sung (as in *Whispered Inanga* (Fales 1995) or failing to hear one sound’s consistency with another (its “normativity”), a sound is heard according to schemas of racialized, gendered or otherwise categorized bodies in accordance with the values of the given society. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, the sound as so perceived is considered evidences of the existence of these categories.

As the listener makes sense of the sound as it fits into her perceived world, performers also make unconscious changes—timbral manipulation—to their performances. The effect of timbral manipulation is phenomenal rather than reflective and conscious. Although neither musicians nor listeners should be expected to be able to describe this unconscious process, Fales suggests that to interpret timbre variations as indirect evidence that musicians use timbre strategically would be entirely consistent with what is known about unconscious processes (Fales 78). Skilled musicians tend to choose the sound that works best in any given context. In the case of vocal pedagogy, then, it is very likely that young singers respond to teachers’ positive reactions to their voices sounding in accord with the visual color line. Recall also bell hook’s stark description of her all-white teachers’ and colleagues’ ideas of the true literary voice of a young black woman.

Although, as we have seen, the instinctual goal of listening is to identify the source of a sound, there are a variety of reasons and motivations for source identification.

Fales' investigation acknowledges that musicians, regardless of their degree of awareness, manipulate timbre to take advantage of the different degrees of listener perceptualization available. Her research is a crucial stepping point in my examination of the listener's perceptualization (ethnic and racial designation) of the sound source and the unconscious process of projecting those designations onto the singer. I also consider the process by which the singer, as a consequence, responds to that compound perception of her voice.

Conclusion

Overtones and timbres of sounds in music have not always been recognized or conceptualized. The first quotes' ironic comment that overtones exist "only for M. Rameau and a few equally scholarly ears" turns out to capture the phenomenon of timbre in quite an accurate fashion. The second quote addresses one listener's awareness of this process: Mthethwa is aware that the sound is not stable, rather that it changes according to the "ear" or perhaps to the attitude the listener assumes while listening.

As meaning and affect of music are dependent on a number of interlocking processes, the perception of timbre shifts depending on the contingencies involved in these processes. In this chapter I addressed historical and perceptual contingencies in the perception of timbre that work(ed) in tandem with cultural and social frameworks. Given these contingencies, it becomes necessary to analyze the compound effect of the sound source, location, and listener. It is especially urgent to investigate the processes involved

in performers' unconscious reactions to listener perceptions, and their adjustments in performances of timbre in response to positive feedback. Therefore, instead of allowing timbre to be subsumed conceptually as simply the sound of the source, I conclude by proposing to sensitively examine the *performance* of timbre. It is to this I now turn.

Chapter 6

Performing Timbre/Shaping the Vocal Body

Introduction

The central assumption of this dissertation, stemming from Shepherd and Wicke's *Music and Cultural Theory*, is that the meanings and the sounds of music are inherent social processes, and therefore unstable and negotiable. It is also assumed that the sounds of music are medium through which meanings are trafficked. In chapter 5 by closely examining one parameter of the sound of music—timbre—we saw it has forcefully been endowed with a variety of meanings. I established that the perceptual framework within which sounds are apprehended guides the meanings the listener is capable of mining from them.

The study of timbre poignantly exemplifies the ways in which altered perceptions of the physical world may invite listeners to hear old sounds anew. We have seen that progress in philosophy and science during the French Enlightenment (and the peak of colonialism) gave rise to a perceptual leap that was necessary in order to begin hearing overtones, and to start developing a more nuanced and articulate relationship with timbre. I have suggested that a desire to catalogue the phenomena of the world, and a preoccupation with the discovery of new materials, peoples, customs, flavors, and sounds during this period lent a particular order to the ways in which timbre was first systematized. And I have suggested that this order has continued to influence the

different ways in which timbre has subsequently been understood. New perceptions of timbre arose from cultural shifts; thus by examining the changing paradigms that have affected our understanding of the world, we may identify some of the values that have defined our concepts of timbre. Our perceptual frameworks not only define new potentials for the apprehension and consumption of timbre, but also shape the meanings trafficked through it.

Meaning molded by the perceptual framework was exemplified in chapter 1 in which we observed that the meanings read from students' vocal timbres were shaped by their teachers' perceptual frameworks regarding race and ethnicity. When a teacher projected a race and ethnicity based on her reading of the student's voice, the student would subsequently adjust to and fulfill the sonic image that was projected onto her. In examining the construction of so-called African-American vocal timbre, we have seen that categories of vocal sound are created through an active process of favoring certain desired timbres while eliminating others. We saw that the favored timbres supported a particular taxonomy of race, ethnicity, and subjectivity. The repeated (re-)production of these selected timbres by singers permanently engraves them on bodies. It therefore may appear as timbre *confirm* that taxonomy rather than having been formed by it. However, timbre *reflects* the taxonomy from which it was formed. The gravitation towards adhering and thereby confirming racialized timbral taxonomies is present even in music technology where—as in vocal synthesis software such as Vocaloid—there are infinite possibilities of timbre. Instead we saw that synthesized voices (re-) produce race-based timbral taxonomy.

In other words, because the perceptual framework through which timbre and the sounds of the singing voice are experienced gives rise to the meaning of their sounds, and shapes the sound-producing-body itself through continual repetition, it is crucial to investigate this *process of production* rather than simply to accept the sounds and the meanings we hear in them at face value.

In this chapter I theorize timbre, not as a stable, measurable object, but as both a social process and a performative act. The meanings we hear operating through timbre, as we read in chapter 1, are not inherent to the sounds of music but rather stem from the *performance*—through timbral nuances—of race, gender, socioeconomic class, and other categories crucial to social formation. As established in chapter 5 and as will be elaborated in chapter 7, timbre, the central defining characteristic of sound, is defined as much in the listener's perception as it is by the substance of the sound. That is, the character and meaning of timbre are inherently unstable. The process of hearing necessarily involves foregrounding some aspects, while filtering out others. Thus the resulting selection of the aspects of sound which come to our awareness is made as much in this editing process as in the material presence of the sound. The timbre that comes to characterize a sound is therefore also inherently unstable. Because of this instability, and the active listening process through which it is identified, timbre has been attributed to extra-sonic phenomena such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Therefore, timbres and the identities they come to express are *performances*—by both the singer and the listener—of timbres and identities.

To develop a perspective on the performance of timbre I look to Erving Goffman and J.L. Austin examining theories of the performance of self and everyday identity; and,

aided by the work of Judith Butler, the performance of social categories. Although Canadian sociologist and social anthropologist Goffman's work is wide-ranging, to learn more about the performance of self we will focus on his 1959 work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in which he proposes that everyday social actions are the results of people's *presentation* (performance) of identity. Goffman based most of his work on ethnographic observation. Using actors on a theatrical stage as metaphors for how people live their lives, Goffman coined the concept "dramaturgical analysis", which views both the self and everyday life as performed and presented *acts*. Philosopher J. L. Austin theorized performative utterances, or speech acts. The title of the later publication of his William James lecture series (Harvard, 1961), *How to Do Things with Words*, suggests that words are not merely descriptive, but that actions are undertaken through the enunciation of certain words and phrases. Thus from the viewpoint of sociology everyday activities are conceptualized as acts of presenting the self; while from that of philosophy, *words* are theorized as actions—however from both perspectives speech and words are considered *performed* activities.

Judith Butler is arguably the North-American theorist most influential in the introduction of the concept of performed social categories, such as sex and gender, to worldwide intellectual communities. Drawing on and critiquing psychoanalytical traditions, Butler proposes that ingrained social categories of sex and gender are performed rather than *a priori*; and that, rather than binary poles, there exist degrees and nuances in the performance of sex and gender. Although Butler does not address issues of race per se, her work on the performance of social roles may be fruitfully applied to the performance of other social categories such as race and ethnicity.

In this chapter I also explore performativity as it is theorized through a very different lineage that includes French poststructuralism, phenomenology and deconstruction as offered by Jacques Derrida. Some of Derrida's work enables us to address how performances of social categories are limited and constructed by language metaphors. It also allows us to address the processes by which these performances become permanently inscribed in the singer's body.

Goffman, Austin, Butler and Derrida do not deal directly with the sounds of music. However, Suzanne Cusick has extended Butler's work on the performance of gender to the realm of vocal music. And while Cusick provides a bridge from visual to sonic performance of social categories, Frantz Fanon, one of the foundational contributors to postcolonial studies, proposes that the performance of race through language necessitates the conception and maintenance of contrasting categories. For example, the category *black* is made stable by the oppositionality created by the maintenance of the contrasting category *white*. Thus the practice and concept of *passing* has been identified to provide a space for subversive and destabilizing acts. While Fanon has addressed this in terms of race, performance scholar Jose Muñoz theorizes the power of the solo drag performance, or the act of passing, to subvert categories of sex, race and gender. While Muñoz works mostly in the visual and textual realm, I will in the preceding chapter employ his analytical framework to examine the vocal timbre and the powerful, subversive performance of expected social categories of the American jazz and ballad singer Jimmy Scott.

Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts from Sociology: Irving Goffman

Canadian sociologist Irving Goffman's work has gone beyond the first wave of influence with his now classic work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), continued to provide a foundation for fields beyond sociology.¹²⁴ In anthropology, on the Continent, his work influenced transactionalist and methodological individualist in the 50s and 60s. This work, in turn, influenced British anthropology. In the United States, in the 80s and 90s, we can also see parallels between Goffman and Victor Turner's "anthropology of performance" (1986). And, although Goffman famously denied the label symbolic interactionist, his work has been very important to this field. The term symbolic interactionism, coined by American sociologist Herbert Blumer, refers to the idea that people act towards things in the way the things have meaning for them: people create meaning through social interactions and people act the way they do to define the situation at hand. Goffman's work did focus on the study of face-to-face interaction and the understanding how humans perceive and define situations and interaction,¹²⁵ but, perhaps rather than being a complacent symbolic interactionist, one of Goffman's contributions was to honestly investigate *how to study* human interactions.¹²⁶ Grounded in

¹²⁴ Parker and Sedgewick (1995) provide a useful overview over some of Austin's pertinence beyond philosophy.

¹²⁵ The opposite of studying human interactions as tools of defining the situation and the meaning of the situation, would be *behaviorism* which assumes that there is no interaction between stimulus and response.

¹²⁶ Goffman's focus on humans and their interactions among each other and with their environment is indebted to the foundation provided by social theorists and anthropologists such as Karl Marx (1818-1883), sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Max Weber (1864-1920) and Margaret Mead (1901-1978). He came out from the influential Chicago School of sociology which was heavily invested in ethnographic methods.

the assumption that there is no Truth with capital T but interpretations real for individuals, Goffman examined people's interactions, exchanges, and choices.¹²⁷

Goffman analyzed the individual's actions and interactions and the interactivity of meaning through a framework he called 'dramaturgical approach.' The underlying question is: how does the actor (the individual) present herself in the public, everyday, life; what is the intended meaning of this presentation; what is the actual meaning understood by the audience (other people in their own performances of their everyday life) and how is it understood by the broader social context (1959: 240).

The performance exists regardless of the individual—the actor's—level of awareness of the performance. In the interaction with others, the individual develops an identity, a persona, that interacts with the other. Goffman then calls the individual's identity 'the front,' "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance (22)." The front acts as a tool of standardization for transactions between individuals and ensures normative behavior. The front provides the proper social role through the choreography of "setting," "appearance," and "manner"—the "collective representation" of the individual (27). In order to fulfill a compelling front, the actor needs not only fulfill her social role, but also consistently *communicate* to other people that role through the activities that would be characteristic of that role. Goffman calls this process the "dramatic realization" (30).

¹²⁷ In sociology this is a subfield in sociology called micro-sociology. Micro-sociology refers to one of the two broad umbrellas of dividing sociological knowledge: micro-sociology which focuses on the individual's actions, the individual's relation to the group and how the group's values influences the individual and vice versa; while macro-sociology focuses on the structures of the society, the relationships between these structures, and how these structures affect us.

By applying Goffman's analytical framework to a classical vocal environment, we may examine the interactions and dynamics taking place between and within the different groups of workers (singers, musicians, staff, conductor, director, stage and costume, designer stage crew, and administrative staff) in a North-American opera company at a particular historical moment. How does the individual actor present him-/herself in this 'setting'? What constitutes the 'front' constructed by each group, and what are the particularities of the 'dramatic realization' of that front? Choosing one of these groups of workers, for example the singers, we could examine the dynamics between sub-groups: soloists in main roles, soloists in supporting roles, and singers in the opera choir. If the company maintained an international pool of singers, we might have a chance to study the sonic 'dramatic realization' of national schools of singing. As was mentioned in chapter 1, European nations and regions (for example the Italian, French, German, and Slavic schools of singing) have developed different ideals and standards in terms of timbre and performance, which are conceived as national schools of singing.

As have been established, vocal timbre, although limited by each singer's instrument, is extremely flexible and may express the identity of a group as well as an individual identity. We know that when listening to speech we can recognize an individual speaker's voice; however, the details of the way a person speaks—*simultaneously*, and without contradiction—offer information about group identity, such as the geographic region to which she belongs. When listening to singing, the audience is also able to recognize group identities (for example, "an American school of singing") while also recognizing an individual voice, for example, "I recognize this voice as Dawn

Upshaw's and not Renee Fleming's", although the voices of both singers would be identified as belonging to the American school of singing.

In outlining the different groups to be considered in a dramaturgical analysis of this opera company, I first described a setting in which interactions between people – their actions, choice of words, body language, etc. – could be analyzed. I then suggested that social and cultural identities such as national schools of singing may be performed through vocal timbre alone. The timbral “profiles” of some national schools of singing may be described thus, in brief: the Italian school sounds open, warm, and smooth; the German school sounds hard, heavy and less flexible than the Italian; the French school sounds lighter and brighter than both the Italian and the German; and the Slavic school sounds darker and heavier than the German school. Thus, singers are marked by the vocal tradition within which they are trained. And singers uphold that tradition, keeping it separate and distinct from other vocal schools through the execution of a certain set of timbral ideals.

It should be clarified that although these schools of singing are named after countries and regions, and originate and are maintained in those countries and regions, the terms refer to the training which produces a particular, recognizable vocal timbre (rather than to the singers themselves). A singer of French nationality, with Frenchmother tongue, could for example train in an Italian conservatory and develop as a singer of the Italian school. And vice versa: an Italian teacher could be employed by a German conservatory to train German students (and those of other nationalities) in a German conservatory to develop as singers of the Italian school.

Goffman does not only explore the individual, but also how individuals are forming groups. Through the concept of “team” he describes how individuals “co-operate” through performance to achieve the goals by the group (79). Depending on the objective for the group, the goal can be similarity between the goal for each member of the group, or different roles for each team member. In any case, the individual actor presents a front that is in accordance with the goal and enhancement of performance of the group. The group represents pressure and less likelihood for dissent of the individual to maintain the front that will promote the performance of the team.¹²⁸ Although what often unifies the members of the team is less comprehensive and complete than the requirement of each member’s performance, each actor feels a pressure to contribute to the unified front when presented with an audience. Because deviance puts the credibility of the performance at question, dissent is carried out away from the audience. Here changes in ideological and modifications in performance can be modified without threatening the credibility of each individual’s front and the overall goal of the team. This marks a clear division between the team and the audience.

In terms of our discussion of national schools of singing and their associated vocal timbres, the objective for the team, the singers, might be to maintain a strong individual identity in encounters with other national schools of singing. Let’s say a singer

¹²⁸ “Impression management” is the ability or inability to control these actions through performance for a desired effect: When the actor constructs a front, a variety of means of communication must be controlled for the audience to be convinced of the role assumed. Is this a believable person? Believability is constructed by the audience’s verification of whether the verbal signification resonates with the non-verbal signification. The refinement of the performance lies in a front as consistent with the norms and laws of society as possible (Goffman 1959: 35). Behavior that is not consistent with this is hidden from the audience to legitimize the social role of the individual and to confirm the social framework to which it belongs (Goffman 1959: 67).

from the Italian school of singing were to audition in a German opera house for a German conductor known to favor Italian-school voices. The auditioning singer will then most likely perform her Italian-school singing to her fullest capacity. She might even exaggerate traits and characteristics of the Italian school that she might not emphasize “at home.” Internal discussions about what constitutes the Italian school of singing in 2008, and any dissent, will most likely wait until she returns and sings and interacts with singers of the Italian school. During her audition for a German conductor with a preference for the Italian style of singing is not the time to push for radical change. Thus, this decision to keep any discussion about the nuances of the Italian school of singing private clearly marks the group (singers from the Italian school of singing) as set off from the audience (as a conductor likely to hire singers of the Italian school).

Goffman’s “dramaturgical” analysis has been criticized for not considering certain kinds of relationship and certain kinds of performances, namely of the marginalized or the dissenting member of society. However, these issues are addressed in later works such as *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963) and *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (1967). Marginalized people are under a tremendous pressure for idealized behavior, or performance. According to Goffmann, marginalized people, based on the nature of their deviance, are forced into “discredited” or “discreditable” groups (1963: 42). In order to interact successfully with others, those who are “discredited” must, with strong impression management, alleviate the tension caused by their stigma. However, those who are under the discrediting stigma, have no other choice than only let others have access to information about their stigma, and take on the role as a discredited individual. When a “discredited” individual tries to

“pass,” she may use “disidentifiers” in the attempt to try to establish “normality (44).” This, however, often results in feelings of alienation and ambivalence. The result of the existence of stigmas is a control and change of the management of interactions. The importance placed on idealized, normative identity limits and controls the interactions between non-normative and normative individuals.

Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts from Philosophy: J.L. Austin

Goffman adopted spatial imagery (on or off stage, front room, back room etc) in the development of his theory of “the presentation of self in everyday life (1959).” Goffman’s title, of course, refers to the idea that “everyday life” is *presented* and exhibits a desired “front” or image of self, and that we present different selves depending on the context. That is, the self, as presented in everyday life situations—even an automatic response to a situation— is *performed*. However, the term “performativity” is often traced to philosopher J.L. Austin. Four years prior to the publication of Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Austin was invited to give the William James lecture series at Harvard University (1955). Along with Goffman’s work, Austin’s series of public lectures and the subsequent editing and publication of the talks, *How To Do Things With Words* (1962), became foundational texts for sub-areas in sociology, philosophy, linguistics (speech act theory) and the development of the field Performance Studies.

Writes Austin, “The term [...] performative is derived, of course, from “perform” [...]: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action. [...] The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even, *the* leading incident in the performance of the act [...] (6-8).” Here Austin identifies precisely what is “done with words:” they constitute actions that create *permanent change* at the *moment of their pronunciation*. Words *do*. Thus the performative moment is identified on a level that does not even have to include spatial and physical actions, but takes place in the moment of committing a speech-act.¹²⁹ John R. Searle, student of Austin, expanded Austin’s theory about communication in *Speech Acts* (1969) and *Expressions and Meanings* (1979). In *Speech Acts*, Searle sums up:

The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act. To take the token as a message is to take it as a produced or issued token. More precisely, the production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions is a speech act, and speech acts [...] are basic or minimal units of linguistic communication. (Searle 1969: 16).

Both Austin and Searle distinguish between what they call “normal real world talk” and “parasitic forms of discourse such as fiction, play acting, etc (quoted in Schechner 2002: 111).” In “normal real world talk” the words are able to commit actions, while in “parasitic forms of discourse,” the words, according to Austin and Searle, do not

¹²⁹ Austin identifies two types of speech acts: constative (describing an object or situation) and performative (producing an action) speech acts. The performative speech acts are again divided into illocutionary and perlocutionary. Illocutionary performative speech acts performs an action with the act of pronunciation, such as “I pronounce you man and wife,” while the perlocutionary speech act produces an action, for example “Don’t touch this.” It has been pointed out that later theories in, for instance, semiotics and cultural theory [refer to specific works] show us that there is not such a division between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. Does, for instance, a critic’s description of a work of art merely describe the work or does it directly affect the act of viewing and the ways in which we consume that work?

commit real actions. For example, saying “I do” in a “real life” ceremony produces a binding, legal agreement; while pronouncing the same words as actors in a theater context will not change the marital status of the actors. So, only in “real life,” in what we in vernacular terms would consider a “non-performative mode,” do our words perform for us or we perform with words.¹³⁰

Austin addresses the power and the action of words that are pronounced, and the meaning associated with the sounds and syllables that form a particular, recognizable word. Whether the action “yes” (as in answering “yes” in a wedding ceremony) is pronounced, spoken, or acted in English (“yes”), German (“ja”), or Spanish (“sí”) each speech-act, although having a different sound, performs the same action. The act is associated with the *meaning* of the sounds that formed that word, and not with the *sound* of the word with that meaning.

In developing my theory of the performativity of identity through the voice, I contend that the timbre of a sung vocal line carries as much meaning as do the meaning of the words uttered in a speech-act. The production and dissemination of a particular vocal timbre is an act with an impact similar to a speech act. The emission of a particular vocal timbre is a self-presentation as active as the pronunciation of sounds that form a word with a particular meaning.

¹³⁰ Richard Schechner, one of the founding voices in the field of performance studies comments that Austin and Searle’s division between real life and “parasitic forms of discourse such as fiction, play acting, etc.” is limited in its understanding of performance. Schechner’s work, a director, writer and educator, “explore(s) the limit between Life and Theater” (August Boal about Richard Schechner in an epigraph to *Performance Studies: An Introduction*) and notes that “Searle and Austin take this position because they don’t recognize that art can be a model for rather than a mirror of life” (Schecher 2002: 111). Schechner points to the collapse between “fiction” and “life” in for example the forms of reality television.

While Goffman addresses the performance of everyday life from a sociological tradition; Austin identifies the everyday life activity—the speech act—as a performative action; North-American feminist and queer studies theorist Judith Butler detects that social categories that structure our lives, such as gender, are not essential, but rather complete performances.

Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts from Feminist and Queer Studies: Judith Butler

Today, Judith Butler's work on gender and sex—while positing the terms as neither an essential nor a constructed concept, but a performance, a “drag” made of fractured pieces – may first come to mind when we consider the “performativity” of a category. Specifically, Butler addressed the categories “woman” and “man,” and proposed in *Gender Trouble* (1989) that by identifying gender as a performance, a set of costumes, a show we put on, we can locate the binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine as far away from the essential as is imaginable.

At base, her critique is an interrogation of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis. Her work may easily be read as an attack on Freud's notion of gender; she problematizes his enormous influence which gave rise to the binary logic which states that each of us belongs to one of two genders and desires the other. According to Freud, even if a man desires a man, he does not simultaneously see *himself* as a man, and therefore his desire is “correctly” focused on the opposite gender, represented by his image of himself. Butler

questions the tendency of psychoanalysis to gravitate toward the “grand narrative” in which the category “woman” is envisioned as *a priori*, abstract and universal.

Butler turns to Freud himself, and his theory of how fantasy identification shapes identity, for answers. In the process of fantasy identification, we identify with the person we believe or want another person to be. Our own model of identity is then based on an imaginative construction. Thus, Butler uses Freud’s own theoretical tools when she suggests that gender as an identification with a single sex category (mother or father) is an identification based on a fantasy. Gender is thus a secondary, rather than a primary, narrative effect. And, according to this logic, gendered subjectivity may be seen “as a history of identifications, as parts of which can be brought into play in given contexts and which, precisely because they encode the contingencies of personal history, do not always point back to an internal coherence of any kind (Butler 1989: 331).” In effect, gender becomes a fantasy enacted by “corporeal styles that constitute bodily significations (334);” that is, our enactments do not refer to a “core” gender.

Perspectives and Foundational Thoughts: Conclusion

Goffman, Austin and Butler, respectively, address the performance of “self” (the self Goffman talks about is something like the identity one wishes to project to the outside world), actions through utterance, and the performance of binary social categories. Although none of them tackle music, the making of music, musicians or music audiences per se, music is a cultural practice and, in the words of Susan McClary,

“a medium that participates in social formation by influencing the ways we perceive our feelings, our bodies, our desires, our very subjectivities (1994).” Therefore, as we will see in the work of Suzanne Cusick, these theories can be fruitful to explore when investigating music performance.

Performing Vocal Timbre and Identity: Suzanne Cusick

Suzanne Cusick is one of the few who has explicitly located the performative to the sound, to the performative aspects of the timbre of the voice, and to the expression of a gendered identity through the timbre of the voice. Drawing on Butler’s foundational study of the performance of social categories through the visual, speech, actions and interactions, Cusick extends Butler’s idea of the performance of social categories to take place in the inner workings of the human voice.

In her 1999 article, "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex," Cusick describes vocal parameters signifying masculinity and femininity. Coining the terms capital S *Song* (penetration of the feminized body by culture) and capital S *Speech* (the male renunciation of Song), Cusick’s work rests on Butler’s theoretical foundation—gender not as inherent, but as performed. In both these practices, Speech and Song, the vocalizer is obligated to present coherent gendered selves. Cusick recognizes that, vocally speaking, performed gender binaries are not only located to pitch (as, for

example, very formally outlined in the vocal range of each in *fach*¹³¹ in opera) but also as developed through timbre.

Cusick sees Pearl Jam’s lead vocalist Eddie Vedder as an example of the *refusal* of Song— a formulation wherein Song is defined as submission to training, to Culture, which produces a smoothness of the voice. With the performance of Speech—roughness of the voice—Vedder refuses “penetration” and submission to Culture. For Cusick, Speech is one common performance of masculinity. Cusick’s second example, the Indigo Girls’ folk-rock vocals point to artists who train out the roughness of the voice, and thereby potentially submit to the “penetration” of Culture. However, Cusick strategically theorizes the Indigo Girls’ play with gender-stereotypical female voices as extreme. Following Butler’s cue, Cusick interprets the *excessive* smoothness of the duo’s voices as a self-conscious feminine, gendered performance, riffing on a trope to such a degree that this performance overloads the patriarchal definition of femininity, and thereby reclaims femininity. By exploiting existing gender norms, the Indigo Girls, Cusick argues, create a lesbian vocal subjectivity.

Both Vedder and the Indigo Girls may be seen to play with expectations of vocal timbre and gender, bringing to their performance their own knowledge of expectations about gender and vocal timbre as well as their awareness of their audiences’ relationship to vocal-timbral categories. Cusick’s analysis of the timbral performances of Eddie Vedder and the Indigo Girls demonstrates “a crucial feature of Butler’s theory about gender as performative: that the field of possible individual performances is extremely

¹³¹ *Fach* is the term for the different vocal profiles in opera such as lyrical soprano, dramatic mezzo-soprano, *helden* (hero) tenor and so forth. Each of these vocal types is defined with a vocal range and the theatrical role they fill. For example, the lyrical soprano and the lyrical tenor are the romantic leading characters.

broad, allowing for a tremendous number of variations that are intelligible, permissible, and capable of being subversive only insofar as they cite or allude to prevailing cultural norms (1999: 38).”

Although, by addressing the negotiation and play of power and psychoanalytical tradition by problematizing Freud’s rigid gender binary and heavily influenced by Continental theorists such as Foucault, one could consider part of Butler’s project as an elaboration of Goffman’s. While Goffman clarified that we perform the identities we wish to project in different contexts, Butler problematizes the notion of identities as strict binaries that have been required to be expressed through the performative. In her most influential work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), one of Butler’s projects is to reveal that one of the mistakes made by feminists was their assertion that “women” were a unified group with common concerns and goals. This position, Butler asserts, only reinforces the traditional binary of gender as two closely defined groups through “an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations (1990: xx).” “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results,” Butler writes (25). Instead of a universally-gendered-you expressed through performance, the performance expresses a gender. In transposing and applying Butler’s feminist and queer theory framework to the analysis of music performance, Cusick finds Butler’s framework most useful in that it addresses the idea that

these performances of a gendered and sexed self are partly, though certainly not entirely, performances of and through the body. . . . For musical performance, too, is partly (but not entirely) the culturally intelligible performance of bodies. Much musical 'composition' can be described as the translation of ideas so they can be performed through bodies. (27)

Goffman and Butler set up a solid foundation for discussing identities as performed through bodies and music. Although Cusick's analysis clearly takes place in a Butlerian universe, I also see the careful analysis of how the lyrics escape the different shaped throats and subsequently different vocal timbres of Eddie Vedder and the Indigo Girls as an extension and elaboration of Austin's concern with the action and performance of the pronunciation of words. By identifying the uttering of a word as an action, Austin opened up the space for thinking about the *pronunciation* and the consideration of the ways we form vocal sound as an action. We can now consider the act of the vocal timbre, the *color, the texture and the weight of the utterance*.

While Cusick specifically addresses how sung vocal sounds work to express the social categories of gender, I explicitly wish to bring the vocal timbral performance of the social categories race and ethnicity into the picture. Drawing on the works of the three theorists Goffmann, Austin and Butler, I would like to meditate on Cusick's assertion that vocal performances are "performances of and through the body" and that "musical 'composition' can be described as the translation of ideas so they can be performed through bodies (27)." Thus, the "ideas" that are performed through the body to which I wish to extend this discussion of performativity of vocal timbre are sentiments regarding race and ethnicity.

Performing Racialized Vocal Timbre

The term *performance* is used (1) by people performing on an actual stage for an audience that comes to view this staged performance, and (2) by philosophers, sociologists, and ethnographers (such as Goffman, Austin, and Butler) who theorize the ways in which we create identity and interact with our world. To study the performativity of timbre, however, we must combine these two ways of thinking about performance. Goffman employs terms from theater and drama (dramaturgy, the stage, the actor) to describe everyday situations; Austin's speech act theory is based on the assumption that there is an inherent difference between speech in everyday life (speech-acts) and speech on stage (parasitic discourse); Butler addresses the inherent gap between the norms and realities of social categories in everyday life—but in theorizing the “situation” of timbral performance we must consider both the formal stage and everyday life.

The study of the performance of timbre reveals how formal stage performance and everyday life consistently intersect with and inform one another. In the genre of classical western opera roles which present a stark contrast between the character of the Other (such as Aida, Madame Butterfly, Carmen, or Dahlila) and the nominal white (such as the Countess, Susanna, Mimi, or Micaela) are situated in tension with the inescapable presence on the stage of race issues in everyday, off-the-opera-stage life. Although the singer performs a role, the singer's everyday performance of race is also still present: thus the performance of everyday life does not end when a singer steps onto the stage. In opera the performance of race in everyday life may be called upon in the performance of an operatic character.

Violinist and writer Rosalyn M. Story's history of African-American female opera singers, *And so I Sing: African-American Divas of Opera and Concert* (1993) devotes a chapter, "Ethnicity: Vocal and Visual," to the question of casting and the race/ethnicity of the character and the singer. In several interviews with leading African-American opera singers of the twentieth century¹³² the politics and policies of racialized casting arise as a major concern in African-American opera singers' careers. Jason Bernard Oby's dissertation *Equity in operatic casting as perceived by African-American male singers* (1996) discusses African-American tenors' prevailing underemployment, while it is not as big a problem for African-American basses. The romantic lead roles are written for tenor voices. The romantic female soprano lead will most likely be filled by a white singer, and African-American male opera singers such as George Shirley¹³³ have proposed that this is why there is a prevailing difficulty in developing a career in opera as an African-American tenor. Career development has proven easier, however, for African-American basses and baritones, the vocal *fachs* written in a darker range. The operatic deviant characters are always written for these lower voice types.

In a vocal performance, the singer is acting and coordinating many different "presentations" (Goffman's term) simultaneously. The first "front" presented by a singer is the musical and vocal genre performed (i.e. the identity of an opera singer versus a folk singer). To again use opera as an example, the second "front" is the vocal school to which the singer belongs (for example the timbral scheme of someone from the French versus someone from the Italian national school of singing). The third "front" is the vocal fach

¹³² Simon Estes (bass baryton), Shirley Verrett (soprano), Martina Arroyo (alto), Grace Bumpry (soprano), and more.

¹³³ Interview in *Aida's Brother and Sister*.

to which their voice type belongs (for example dramatic versus lyrical soprano). The fourth “front” is the operatic role or the piece the singer performs (the same artist may use a different timbral scheme as Mimi in *La Boheme* and as Micaela in *Carmen*, or when singing an aria as opposed to an art song).

When performing an operatic role onstage, the singer is also simultaneously performing each of these fronts; her voice should be heard as a synthesis. There is, however, another area of the performance of everyday life that often overrides the stage character. German opera and theater director and general manager of the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Georg Friedrich, described in an interview how he drew upon a particular dynamic for his casting of Verdi’s *Un Ballo in Maschera* (1859):¹³⁴ The page boy “Oscar is played by a black coloratura soprano.¹³⁵ By which the strangeness, the somewhat erotic relationship between the king and his favorite page takes on a certain color beyond black and white, which indirectly characterizes this erotically irritated king.” In the performance Friedrich describes, African-American soprano Reri Grist plays the role of Oscar and the Count is played by Placido Domingo.¹³⁶ Here director Friedrich forcefully invokes an aspect of the presentation of everyday life that I did not address in the list of the different “fronts” an opera singer performs, namely the performance of race. Reri Grist beautifully fulfills the parameters of the musical and vocal genre; the vocal school;

¹³⁴ Georg Friedrich was interviewed for the documentary *Aida’s Brother and Sister*.

¹³⁵ The character of Oscar is a trouser role, or breeches role: a male character in the drama with a vocal line written for a female voice (normally soprano or mezzo-soprano). These roles are sometimes played by the reverse gender, having originally been written for (male) castrati with soprano-range voices. Today there are no castrato singers, so in order to cast these roles a director must choose between a counter tenor (a male who can sing in falsetto) or a female playing the role of a male.

¹³⁶ In the casting list of a DVD release of this staging, the role of the count, played by Placido Domingo, is listed as Gustavus. Gustavus refers to the king of Sweden on whom the character in the story was first based. This story had difficulty surmounting censorship in Naples and was subsequently rewritten, and the characters renamed. In the staging of many contemporary performances, however, the original version featuring the character of Gustavus III, King of Sweden, is resurrected.

the vocal fach to which her voice type should belong; and the dramatic ability required to perform the role. The audience, however, invariably hears her performances through a self-presentation in which she is embedded by social and cultural dynamics: the performance of race. And although Grist, a soprano who does not cross-dress offstage, plays a male character, the tension is higher in the juxtaposition of the everyday life presentation of African Americanness and her role as a Swedish page than in her everyday life presentation of femaleness and her stage presentation of a young man.

In the world of Western opera, considered by many to be the pinnacle of Western art, normative whiteness is policed by marking the Other. The voice students we visited in chapter 1 were each trained within the American school of singing. Within that larger category, however, they were classified as singers possessing, for example, an African-American vocal timbre. Shirley Verrett, a celebrated African-American opera singer, asserts in an exchange with an interviewer:

Verrett:

“There are moments when I think I can pick out a black voice from a group of people. And there are other times that I would be fooled, because the sound is different. When you hear my voice, do you think it’s a black voice?”

Interviewer: “No.”

Verrett: That’s it. And other people told me this long time ago. So, it mixes me up a little bit.”¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Interview in *Aida’s Brother and Sister*.

When the sonic and the visual performance of race fail to correspond, listeners become “mixed up.” In the following section, I will examine some strategies used in order to ensure correspondence between sonic and visual performance of race.

Performing Race: Shaping Vocal Racialized Timbre

In Part One we saw different examples of vocal timbre as “translations of ideas” of race performed through the vocal body (even when the vocal body is a digital synthesis). These performances were informed by and enacted dominant notions of race and ethnicity. Although they reflected very different situations, one aspect that unified the case studies was a common inequality of power between the vocal bodies that physically produced the sound, and the consumer in the form of voice teacher, audiences, producers and users of software. (In the following chapter I will elaborate, and argue that the listener is also a producer of the sound). In terms of Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of performance, I will identify this inequality as the context within which actors act and react. In the case of classical voice students and teachers, the context is a pedagogical setting within which a one-on-one transfer of information takes place from the teacher to the student. We must also consider that the pedagogical tradition on which classical vocal education is founded is an apprenticeship model wherein the student must fully, and without question, trust the teacher to make decisions such as how to develop the voice, what voice type one has, and what repertoire to sing or not to sing. It is not unusual for

the teacher to also advise the student regarding diet, sleep and most physical and health concerns.

There is an unspoken assumption in vocal education of the student's loyalty to the teacher. Some of the most dramatic stories in classical voice environments are about students' attempts to change from one voice teacher to another, or teachers who eject students from their studios if the desired progress is not made. 100% loyalty over two to six years (the time it takes to achieve a degree) is expected. This is the context within which the exchanges between the voice student and the teacher take place.

Western classical vocal production does not come naturally to singers. The way this style of singing uses the voice is far removed from speech functions in terms of the kind of breath control and the forming of the throat and mouth required to project the voice (with no sound reinforcement) in a large concert hall or opera house. There seems to be no instinctual or intuitive way to move from speech to classical vocal production; rather, the information is carefully passed down from teacher to student. As a student of classical voice for thirteen years, and a teacher of classical voice, I outline this context in order to explain that on the part of the student learning to become a classical singer requires an enormous trust in and commitment to the teacher. The dynamic established in this educational context is unidirectional: the student simply follows the teacher's instructions. And as I have observed both as an active participant in this community and through my ethnography, if a voice teacher has certain "ideas" about race or ethnicity, these ideas are materialized in vocal timbre and developed to become an integral part of the student's voice.

“Musical performance, too,” Cusick writes “is partly (but not entirely) the culturally intelligible performance of bodies.” If, as elaborated in chapters 1 and 2, we believe in racialized bodies (if what is “culturally intelligible” to us is racial difference), then when a body is “sounded” through the voice that racial difference is audible, amplified and broadcasted. The genre of Western classical opera does not allow much possibility for dialect or sociolect to offer cues about the performer in this regard. However, within popular or folk music vocal genres it is possible to hear traces of the origins of the singer in, for example, their way of pronouncing words. In classical vocal music, however, the pronunciation must leave no trace of the dialect or sociolect of the singer. I suggest that because ideas of race and ethnicity so firmly shape social interactions, in classical vocal music the “translation of ideas” of race is “performed through bodies” timbrally.

When a vocal coach, such as Ann who we met in chapter 1, describes the different connection her Anglo-American students versus her Latin-American students have to their bodies and how that affects their vocal sound, I suggest that she is projecting a socio-cultural image from colonial times upon her students’ bodies.

I think [Latin Americans] are connected to their bodies [...] and their guts (said with throaty, “gut sound”) and they make music from their hearts. In European repertoire they talk about that “she broke my heart, I will just lay down and die now,” (said with a very proper voice) and in Hispanic music, the Latino music: “She broke my heart, she ripped it out of my chest and stumped it on the floor!” (nearly screaming). And that’s how their music sounds. It’s very gut. Americans—we don’t operate on that level, we tend to be a visual or cognitive society. (Interview with voice teacher, September 1, 2005).

Ann's image of her Latin-American students' special connection to their bodies is unconsciously built into the vocal timbre she teaches them. As we read in chapter 1, laryngologists have confirmed that there are no physiological vocal differences that would create a distinct Latin-American vocal timbre. Therefore, what seems to confirm an audience's image (like Ann's) of singers who are "connected to their bodies" is the *performance* of the socio-cultural notions of Latin-American classical vocal timbre. By singing vocal lines with a certain color and mass, a particular race or ethnicity is performed and recognized. Ann describes the vocal timbre of a Latin-American opera singer as "warmer" with a "certain weight brought to the top range." She also finds that most Latin-American singers have a "shimmer" along with a "rawness" and "edge" to their voices. Comparably, Ann describes Anglo-American operatic voices as "very flexible," "more slender" with "evenness throughout the register." In effect, the socio-cultural and political categories such as race and ethnicity become a fantasy enacted by "corporeal styles that constitute bodily significations (Butler 1989: 334)" and are projected through vocal timbre.

Theorizing the Vocal Body: Questions

The repeated corporeal performances of social, cultural, and political categories raise larger questions about the body. What is the impact of these performances on the body? What happens to the flexible tissues and the supporting ligaments? How do these performances affect the interplay between body parts that quickly learn and enact

automatic responses? Are the values these performances express permanently inscribed on the body? How can we theorize what these performances do to the body, and what impact the imprints of these performances have on the self?

Theorizing the Vocal Body: Perspectives from Jacques Derrida

If we look to French philosopher Jacques Derrida, we will find that “there is nothing outside of the text (Derrida 1976: 158).” Writing, then, contains all cultural and social activities and expressions. Writing is the graphic inscription of these texts, the inscription of power in the form of laws, rituals, politics, pedagogy, economic relations, the arts, and so on. Writing implies an authoritative author, assumes the inherent authority of the text, and enacts the agenda of power. Therefore, no writing is the first, and no writing is the last. Every time we try to write, to erase what came before, we find that it is impossible. Writing is a palimpsest, a constant re-writing over a prior document that may never be entirely erased. Therefore every act of writing is a struggle for power.

The activity of singing (including the vocal utterance, the pedagogy of singing, and the consumption of song) is—within a broad consideration of Derrida’s theory—writing. However, on a more concrete, analogous level, singing is very close to the scratching of words into a piece of wood and the pressure of a pen applying ink to paper. Singing is imagined as the immediate, uncensored sound of the body of the singer, but if we follow Derrida’s train of thought, this fantasy is problematic. If the activity of singing is conceived as inscription on an imperfectly erased canvas, writing in the midst of

narratives of the body, race, class, vocal genres and practices, then the sound of singing becomes the sound, and the echo, of that fragmented palimpsest. In the case of the voice, those narratives are also inscribed into the musculature of the body, and thus the fragments are sounded as a coherent whole.

Central to his work is Derrida's notion of writing "sous rature"—under erasure. Writing "sous rature" may be explained in different ways, all of which address a self-conscious use of language. This process points to the limitations and implications of the impossibility of using language to communicate and the impossibility of not using language to communicate. Writing "sous rature" reveals and faces this dilemma by simultaneously using and erasing language. When needing to express something through language that is "inaccurate yet necessary" to say (Spivak in intro 1976: xiii-xiv), the writer is left with this "technique"—or "experience" as Derrida prefers to describe deconstruction (Stephens 1994: xx). Spivak explains further, "The predicament to use resources of the heritage one questions is the overt concern of Derrida's work (Spivak note 13 in Derrida, 1976: xviii)." Thus by writing under erasure Derrida has devised a method of using words whose validity he questions, but has no option but to use: "At each step I was obliged to proceed by ellipses, corrections and corrections of corrections, letting go of each concept at the very moment that I needed to use it (Derrida, 1976: xviii)."

Writing "sous rature" may also be explained in terms of the palimpsest, of writing on a surface which has already been written on and erased. But this erasure is never total: an erasure leaves traces of the erased. When we write over the erased, we are writing on the resonance of what has been written and erased before. Thus writing is never a solo

line, but rather operates within a network of lines stemming from different chronologies—always in interaction—intimately, like a chamber group playing together. Derrida exposes the traces of the erased, and extrudes voices buried deep in the texture.

The palimpsest of language and body, and the imprint of the body's actions on the language in the book, is addressed by Derrida (1980). I offer a reversal of this image, drawing out the line of the imprint of language onto the body. Derrida's notion of writing encompasses all human activity—including writing in the traditional sense—and primarily proposes that meaning is invariably dependent on context. "There's nothing outside the text," we recall Derrida writes, "means there is nothing outside context." His text encompasses all of human culture. Therefore, the concept of "writing" extends beyond the physical act of writing letters on a piece of paper or typing letters into a computer's memory. Writing is the codification of culture in the forms of traditions, laws, politics, economical systems, arts and so on. Within this logic, writing is the carrying out—the performance—of codified culture. Writing then includes cultural corporeal activities such as singing. What is the place of the body in the text? What effect does writing, the text, have on the body?

As we read in chapter 1, the definition of timbre is quite elusive, and depends on the perceptual paradigm through which it is experienced. We observed that shifts in a collective understanding of timbre followed larger perceptual shifts, as well as the development of descriptive terminology for timbre. It appears that one of the central ways we approach the nuances of timbre is through descriptive terms such as "heavy," "dark," "slender," "bright," "light" etc. And it appears that listening is formed through such descriptive terms. As a result of the use of language constituted by descriptive terms that

lump together racialized bodies and vocal timbral qualities, categories are engendered, cultivated and reified. Linguist and cognitive scientist George Lakoff posits, in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1990), that we reason about categories, not only about individual things. Our world is divided into categories, and we ascribe a real existence and an inner coherence to them; thus categorization is crucial to our reasoning process. Lakoff suggests that categories are derived from both human experience and imagination, and that sometimes items belonging to the same category, in effect, do not have common qualities (1990: 8). Thus, when perceptions of timbre are mediated by cultural meanings within written language, timbre is trapped in the performativity of language categories, and categories enacted through language are engraved onto the body through singing.

Voices and vocal timbre are not only heard through categories of language. We invariably hear a single vocal sound in comparison to the sounds of other voices, like a choir of previous voices in our memory. We hear even distinct voices in relation to all previously-heard voices. Although the previously-heard voices are no longer sounding in our immediate acoustic environment—i.e., although they have been erased – their traces remain in our memories. Thus each voice, when heard in the present, is also carefully situated in a particular location within the texture of all voices we have heard in the past.

To hear a voice against other voices is to hear the voice in relation to the cultural meaning of vocal timbre defined within written language (for example identifying “slender,” “flexible” as Anglo-American, or Anglo-American as “slender,” “flexible”). We hear the voice in relation to the ways in which the body of the singer has been racialized, and thereby objectified. Psychiatrist, activist and post-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon writes of one such experience: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find

a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects (Fanon 1952: 10).”

Fanon’s black body was read not as a subject, but as an object arising from colonial history. About such objectification, Fanon writes,

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'" (1952:112).

This process of editing of reading or perception is also written into the text against which each of us is read:

Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates. But in my own case I knew that these statements were false. There was a myth of the Negro that had to be destroyed at all costs. . . . We had physicians, professors, statesmen. Yes, but something out of the ordinary still clung to such cases. "We have a Senegalese history teacher. He is quite bright. . . . Our doctor is colored. He is very gentle" (110).

The reading Fanon describes is one in which the binary between white and black is never erased, and one into which an inequality in power is already written. With this text already written into the social-perceptual document, can an individual be heard *qua* individual? Can an individual be seen as herself, rather than as a representative of a category? Is there a space in the social text for resistance?

The Power of the Solo Performance: Disidentification

Performance studies theorist José Esteban Muñoz has introduced a helpful analytical tool with which to envision the ways in which the essentialized body, and, by extension, the essentialized voice, may “re-write” or decode itself. Building on cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s notion of encoding/decoding, Muñoz locates disidentification as “a hermeneutic, process of production, and a mode of performance (1999: 26).”

Disidentification may be compared to what Hall defines as the third and final mode of decoding, in which meanings are unpacked for the purpose of dismantling dominant codes in order to resist, demystify, and deconstruct readings suggested by dominant culture – that is, an oppositional reception. Disidentification is an “ambivalent modality,” the minority spectator’s survival strategy that “resist[s] and confound[s] socially prescriptive patterns of identification (28).” “Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (31). Disidentification, then, provides a space in which the uneraser voices in the background in fact create the necessary material for performances that carry a potential for dislocated readings and “[resist] the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus (Muñoz 1999: 83).” This practice has the power to reformat the “self within the social [...] that resists that binary of identification and counteridentification (83).” Disidentification is a double performance of “the presentation of self in everyday life.” It is a performance in which the actor possesses a hyper-awareness of the texts already written into the surfaces on which she will also inscribe her own performance. Disidentification, exemplified by

Muñoz through drag performances, is undertaken with a deep knowledge of essentialized subject positions. Through the double performance of such subject positions the unerasable text may surface. Thus purposeful foregrounding of the layered text, these meanings are no longer simply hovering in the background, seemingly offering and confirming essential truth. Instead they are materialized, externalized, and able to be dealt with.

In his article “The White to be Angry: Vaginal Davis’s Terrorist Drag” (1997) Muñoz offers an illuminating analysis of Los Angeles based drag queen Vaginal Cream Davis’s performances. Davis’s various identifying processes are described as assimilation, counteridentification and disidentification. The assimilation period describes the time in Davis’s life when she wanted to disassociate herself with anything “negritified or Black (83).” Referring to it as her Snow period, she explains that she wished to be “projected through some White person, and have all the privileges that white people get—validation through association (84).” Muñoz describes this experience as common to many minority subjects; although this position is sanctioned by the dominant culture, it is not feasible for minority subjects (84). Davis’s next phase consisted in a counteridentification with the dominant culture, an ultramilitant period influenced by the work of Angela Davis and the Black Panthers. But here, also, Davis was unable to pass. She disidentified with the heterosexual militant Black Power by “selecting Angela and *not* the Panthers as a site of self-fashioning and political formation (84).”

Muñoz uses Kimberlé Crenshaw’s term *intersectional strategy* to insist on a “critical hermeneutics that register the copresence of sexuality, race, class and gender, and other identity differentials as particular components that exist simultaneously with

each other (84).” Davis not only disidentifies with heterosexual black masculinity, but also with the “sanitized queen” (85), or commercialized drag performance.

I wasn’t really trying to alter myself to look like a real woman. I didn’t wear false eyelashes or fake breasts. It wasn’t about the realness of traditional drag—the perfect flawless make-up. I just put on a little lipstick, a little eye shadow and a wig and went out there (quoted in Muñoz 86).

Davis did not attempt to fully pass as woman—or as a man (in her drag performance of the white supremacist militiaman Clarence). Davis’s performances resist normative heterosexual Black identification, and even “normative” drag identities. Her performances of drag and the white supremacist militiaman Clarence expose the seams and inconsistencies in either role. Drawing on Felix Guattari’s discussion of the potential power of drag performances, Muñoz theorizes Davis’s *terroristic drag* as “[stirring] up uncertain desire[s]” and enabling subjects to imagine a way of “break[ing] away from the ...restraints on the social body” (Muñoz 85-86).

The tremendous momentum of Davis’ performance is gained through the multiple layers of persona, bodies and stories purposefully exposed (instead of concealed). Davis’ performance is a lesson in the shared responsibility of the reader in the interpretation of the performance. Her performance is a tour de force that evidences what Frederic Jameson and others have argued, namely that instead of “works” we now need to consider the (in a postmodern sense) “text.” Taking fully into account that no work is a closed system and that a “text” is only the “pretext,” in the words of Jann Pasler (2007: 80), Davis’ performance exemplifies that the reader or listener contribute to the

compound meaning developed. I will now turn to an analysis of an artist whose ambiguity in areas crucial for audiences to identify (gender and age) has led to heavy producer- and audience- contributions to this artist's performance of identity.

Part Three

Chapter 7

Jimmy Scott: Disidentification and Drag Reception

Introduction

Cleveland-born jazz and ballad singer James Victor Scott (1925-), known as Jimmy Scott,¹³⁸ “stir[s] up uncertain desire[s] (Muñoz 85).” In Scott’s performances layers upon layers of societal expectations about which bodies are paired with which voices are exposed. Besides demonstrating unique musicianship, Scott sings standard jazz and pop repertoire in a recognizably traditional way. However, in a unique and self-conscious manner Scott’s artistic output exposes the inherent shortcomings of conventional interpretations of and language about vocal performance and vocal timbre. It is through Scott’s rare and precious subject position as an artist I will continue the investigation of the listeners’ contribution to the creation of meaning through the sounds of the voice.

I have proposed that what we hear any given sound of music depends as much on the listener’s perceptual fields as on the sound produced. We saw this idea illustrated not only in changing perceptions which enabled listeners to hear overtones, but also in the evolving notions of subjectivity afforded slaves, enabling abolitionists to begin hearing

¹³⁸ Scott is also known as “Little Jimmy Scott.”

the sound of slaves' mournful voices as song, rather than as noise. Furthermore, we have seen that listeners' hearing processes influence not only the aspects of sound on which the ear chooses to focus, but that listeners' framing and definition of the sounds they hear can actually influence and modify sound. The ethnography of vocal pedagogues in chapter 1 is one illustration of the ways in which listeners produce meaning from sound and furthermore how those "namings" in turn are inscribed into the vocal body and thereby timbre of a singer. Put another way, listeners actively participate in producing the meaning of what they hear, and listeners' definition in turn possesses the power to physically influence vocal production. As a result, the vocal timbre we hear, contrary to popular belief, is not merely the unrefined, essential timbre of the singer's body, but rather it is the manufactured nexus of the physical body of the singer, the audiences' perception of that singer, and the ways in which those perceptions influence vocal production.

This argument was elaborated in Chapter 6 by establishing that social categories such as gender, race, and class are also performed. Rather than essential categories, the categories are *presented* by means of body language, visual cues such as clothing and hairstyle, language (as for example, in words choice and tone), and vocal style. I marked a clear division between the voice as used and performed through speaking and the voice as used and performed through singing. I argued that the timbre of the voice in singing is codified in order to signal different social categories. As syllables form a word and are codified in order to refer to a particular object or concept, timbre in singing can be codified in order to point to social categories such as race and gender.

Looking back to chapter 1, we recall that the performances of these codified timbral categories have corporeal ramifications. They are imprinted in the fissures, and those alterations will be heard in the sounds produced by that body. We may recognize the enforced implications of these performed social categories in a lack, a deafening silence of the voices sounding outside the categories. This raises the obvious question of whether there is space for resistance. By identifying a positionality—disidentification—José Esteban Muñoz (1999) recognized that performance need not only be simply identifying with or only reinscribing previous roles, but that a creative play with even essential identities can prove productive. This performative and theoretical strategy has the ability to articulate the polyphony of sometimes seemingly oxymoronic modalities of race, gender, and sexuality at work in any identity.

The aim of this chapter is to advance the investigation of the performance of social categories through vocal timbre. Accordingly, I examine the intersections, overlaps, and contradictions present in multiple modalities of performance. Issues of race can for instance be clouded in questions of gender (Wong 2004; Hisama 1999) and issues of class can be buried under what seems to be matters of race (Hisama 1999).

One of the clearest illustrations of the complex relationship between the different identities a single person can inhabit may be located to the modes of interpretations each listener brings to the process. Each listener responds to slightly different aspect of the performance and, reifying her own listening experience, adds another layer of meaning to the sound. Recalling Goffman, we remember that individuals define meanings of things through interactions. In other words, audiences do not statically receive information; rather, with her own set of experiences, each individual listener makes sense of the

singer's voice. Therefore the listener's *impressions* of the singer's voice and identity are formed through her own active contribution. The process and the consequences of an individual audience members' involvement in the formation of what she perceives to be the singer's voice will be elaborated in this chapter.

Scott's Performative Strategies

In order to develop an inquiry into the indissoluble relationships between a singer's professional and private identities, it is necessary to examine the dynamic relationship between the singer and the listener in the co-creation of a composite performance. Jimmy Scott's career is a unique example of this. Both Scott's life and career were shaped by his inherited medical condition, Kallman's syndrome, hindering the body to develop into puberty. Scott's voice has therefore remained higher in tessitura than the voice of an average man who has gone through a puberty-induced voice change. At age of twelve the illness stopped his body from growing. Also due to a deficiency in certain hormones, Scott lacks traits such as facial hair, and failed to go through other larger physical changes that transform the body from a boy to that of a grown man. Although throughout his life people have mistaken Scott for a masculine woman, an effeminate man, a homosexual, or a transsexual, Scott describes himself as a "regular guy," and maintains that the most unusual about him is his "obsession" with music (Ritz 2000: 16).

Scott was intensely drawn to music and kept up with the new popular vocal repertoire while working odd jobs from the age of sixteen. He first tried to obtain a position that would allow him to hear live music and meet musicians, and was able to create a job for himself as an usher and valet in a performance space. Working there Smith could hear live music he would not otherwise be able to afford. His first public performance took place while he was still working as a performance space valet when he one night in 1942 managed to convince the musicians he had gotten to know to let him sit in on a few pieces. Scott recalls that the audience stopped dancing and gathered around the stage to listen, and that he heard somebody calling out: “That boy sounds like a grown woman (Ritz 32).”

This first public reaction is representative of the ways people would respond to Scott over the next six decades and the way in which audiences would project essential social categories onto his body. The phenomena when audiences project their own social categories onto Scott—such as in this instance Scott labeled as a “boy” performing a “grown woman”—I term *audience drag performance*. Scott is merely performing himself. However, when audiences are grappling with this to them previously unknown category, they easily rush to attribute the category *drag*. The drag performance is nevertheless purely taking place in the mind of the audience.

And, further, although I will theorize aspects of Scott’s performative strategy as disidentification, Scott’s approach is, in certain ways, the opposite of an artist like Davis who strategically exposes *layers* of identity. The power of her performance is collected in the seemingly impossible conversation between the different identities she inhabits. The dissonance formed between Davis’s simultaneous identities as African-American queer,

“home-made” drag queen, and white supremacist militiaman gathers meaning through counterpoint—while, besides his superior musicianship, Jimmy Scott’s performance is surprisingly conventional. He is simply an African-American heterosexual male from a midwestern working class family who made music and singing his profession. Therefore, in the case of Scott, it is the *audience* who aches to read queerness, drag, and liminality into his persona. Says Scott:

In my adult life, people have looked at me as an oddity. I’ve been called a queer, a little girl, an old woman, a freak, and a fag. [...] They say I don’t belong in any category, male or female, pop or jazz (Ritz xv).

As we saw in the previous chapter, Judith Butler points to a significant gap between imagined essential categories and reality. However, the ways in which Scott’s life and career have been read and shaped by his audience reveals the ways in which his listeners gravitate toward defining him superficially against those essential categories. When Scott does not perform a copy of the essential male figure, he is quickly assumed to perform drag in terms of age, gender, or musical style. While Vaginal Cream Davis’s drag performances expose the seams that hold together the seemingly consistent, coherent and contained categories of black male, drag performance, and white supremacist militiaman, Jimmy Scott’s performance exposes *the seams in us*. In the responses to his work, we see the necessity for an audience to read drag into an identity that does not correspond with an (essential) consistent, coherent and contained image of a heterosexual African-American male jazz singer. Therefore, by resisting definitions like “[h]e looks part Native American, part Pinocchio (Ritz xiii),” Scott—by engaging in the opposite of a drag performance and by clinging to the role of the heterosexual African-American male jazz singer—in fact *disidentifies* with the reading of such liminal identities.

Audience Drag Performance in Reception

The producers of some of Scott's records from the 1960s attempted to avoid confusion about Scott's idiosyncratic heterosexual male performance by themselves providing a drag performance on one cover and a cover with a male and a female that confirmed to more essential roles of heterosexual identity. A young, beautiful woman—the picture of a model—is shown on the cover of the album *The Source*¹³⁹ (Figure 14), while a picture of two young heterosexual lovers graces the cover of *Falling in Love Is Wonderful*¹⁴⁰ (Figure 15).

¹³⁹ Atlantic Records, 1969.

¹⁴⁰ Tangerine Records, 1962. Reissue by Rhino, 2002. It was Joe Adams, Ray Charles manager who came up with the cover idea.



Figure 14 Cover of *The Source*. Atlantic Records, 1969



Figure 15 Cover of *Falling in Love is Wonderful*. Tangerine Records, 1963

“I understood what they wanted,” Scott says about the cover for *The Source*, and continues, “[n]aturally I would have preferred to see myself somewhere on the cover, but if they thought that would help sell the thing,¹⁴¹ I could only hope they were right (Ritz 157).”

In designing the cover of *The Source*, the record company’s marketing team responded to and played with audiences’ perceptions of Scott as a female singer. Here we see a feedback loop between listeners’ suggestions and the ways in which the suggested image is re-produced and elaborated. Joel Dorn, the producer of *The Source*, said that after seeing the record packaging featuring the female model’s photo, more audiences believed Jimmy Scott to be a woman with a man’s name (Ritz 158). Thus the packaging for *The Source* suggest a few possible explanations for Scott’s voice and physicality: Jimmy Scott is a woman with a man’s name, or Jimmy Scott is a man making his voice sound like a female’s and dressing in drag as a young woman.

When Scott describes his reaction on seeing the cover of *Falling in Love is Wonderful* he says, “[of] course it hurt [...] It’s your record and you want to see your picture (Ritz 133).” With *Falling in Love is Wonderful* did the producer feel it necessary to project Scott’s voice out of a male actor’s body, or a young woman who could both pass as white or black?¹⁴² Recalling Austin’s notion of “parasitic forms of discourse” (as in a play) and “real world talk” (when we talk as “ourselves”), the production of these

¹⁴¹ Because of legal issues with a previous record company to which Scott had been signed, *The Source* was pulled off the shelves not long after its release (Ritz 158-159).

¹⁴² Recall from chapter 2 that Jeff Smith in “Black Faces, White Voices: The Politics of Dubbing in Carmen Jones (2003) suggests that the dubbing of Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafontes voice’s were prompted by particular racial politics.

recordings offers up an interplay between Scott's speech acts/timbral acts as himself in the recording studio, and the "parasitic" acts delivered to the audience that consumed him through these records. I suggest that the record company was more comfortable presenting Scott's voice in a different image than himself, essentially in drag, rather than with his non-essential black male heterosexual identity.

Throughout his life, Scott has always been open about his medical condition and how it has affected him. He has also been open about his heterosexuality. Was it too problematic for audiences to interact with his mode of black masculinity so different from the stereotypical, hypersexed black male that figures in the popular imagination? Herman Grey (1995) writes that for him "jazz men articulated a different way of knowing ourselves and seeing the world through a very different 'structures of feeling' they assumed, articulated and enacted (401)." The iconic figures he points to—Miles Davis and John Coltrane—despite their very different view and treatment of the women in their lives, played public roles of unambiguous masculinity and heterosexuality. Grey argues that Davis' and Coltrane's "black masculinity [...] not only challenged whiteness but exiled it to the (cultural) margins of blackness—i.e. in their hands blackness was a powerful symbol of the masculine (Grey 401)."

Not only did such popular contemporary jazz figures (Scott's own pronounced heroes) provide powerful models for heterosexual men, they also offered African-American men a space that turned blackness into hypermasculinity. In this environment, where "black masculinity is figured in the popular imagination as the basis of masculine hero worship (Grey 402)," it is "the same black body—super star athlete, indignant rapper, 'menacing' gang member, ad pitch-man, appropriate middle class professional,

movie star—onto which competing and conflicting claims about (and for) black masculinity are waged (402).”¹⁴³ Within this framework Scott’s radically different physicality and masculinity almost eliminates his potential for negotiating blackness. Scott’s voice has therefore been heard through various avatars imagined and materialized by audiences and producers.

The Source

Although Scott’s career as a professional singer stretches about six decades, from the mid 1940s¹⁴⁴ to the present, it was only during a short period in the late 1980s that he managed to achieve larger commercial attention and success. He has been on the brink of large scale fame a number of times, but—family issues, trouble with contracts, producers pulling out because they were afraid Scott was too different—something always interfered with the big breakthrough one might expect from an artist of his caliber and continued exposure. Instead, his own voice—interpretations, phrasings and nuances—has consistently been heard through other singers’ voices. Nancy Wilson, two-time winner of the Grammy’s Best Jazz Vocal Album prize, said¹⁴⁵ “...I followed his career and based my style on his” ever since she heard Scott’s version of “When Did You Leave Heaven?” David Ritz, the author of the biography *Faith in Time: The Life of Jimmy Scott* sees

¹⁴³ There are however new modes of black masculinity emerging today such as the performance work of for instance Andre 2000.

¹⁴⁴ Scott worked as a freelancer around Cleveland for some years before Caldonia (Estella Young), a contortionist artist, invited him to join her tour in 1945.

¹⁴⁵ In 1964 and 2005.

Wilson's influence by Scott as "walking the line between imitation and emulation (136)." "[A]t times her styling sounds more like Jimmy Scott than Jimmy Scott does," Ritz opines (136). Wilson also says that people do ask her, particularly when she sings "When Did You Leave Heaven?" if she has heard Jimmy Scott's version. "Without his example I—along with so many singers—would be lost," Nancy Wilson says when she sums up Scott's influence on his contemporaries.¹⁴⁶

The 1969 album, *The Source* was in fact named to acknowledge the influence Scott's distinctive vocal style has had on American singers. "For modern jazz singing—especially modern *female* jazz singers—Jimmy really is the indisputable source," Joel Dorn, the producer of the *The Source*, says (Ritz 157). Scott's influence has been heard in generations of singers: his voice was a model for Billie Holiday, Betty Carter, Dinah Washington, Diana Ross, and Liza Minelli, to mention a few. So, if Scott did not intentionally perform drag, at least female jazz singers "channeled" his voice. And, if in Davis' performance the white supremacist words took on their gravity and inconsistency through a drag performance, Scott's voice was most intently heard through the voice of other singers.

In 1988 Jimmy McDonough wrote a piece about Jimmy Scott published in the *Village Voice* (Morrow, *Jimmy Scott Biography*). This article reached a different—urban, hipster—audience, and, along with Scott's chance performance (he was simply in the audience and was asked to perform) at the Blue Note's Eighth Anniversary celebration in honor of Cab Calloway, contributed to a renewed interest. This interest led to an

¹⁴⁶ Other icons of American music such as Marvin Gaye and Ray Charles reminisce about how Scott's version of a particular song ("I wish I didn't love you so" and "Someone to watch over me," respectively) became a significant influence on their singing styles.

appearance in David Lynch's twenty-ninth episode of the television series *Twin Peaks*, "Beyond Life and Death." Lynch said he was drawn to Scott's energy and therefore gave him the role of Death. A few artists who had their first major successes in the 1980s have also used Scott to underline some element of "Otherness"-energy. Madonna used him in her *Secret* (1993) video. Lou Reed took Scott as the opening act on his *Magic and Loss* European tour. Scott is here described by way of the emotions he triggers: "Jimmy Scott's voice," the pop star Madonna is known to have said, "makes me weep." And Lou Reed confesses: "He has the voice of an angel and can break your heart."¹⁴⁷

Sex and Death

It is interesting to note that the performance that most recently resuscitated Scott's career was the role of Death. Sex and death are states which, in the words of Bonnie Gordon, "involv[e] a physical transformation and flux that threatened the unity of the body (1999:10)" and have occupied a space of liminality since early modern times. Sex, or the question of sex, is at the forefront of people's minds when encountering Scott. 17th and 18th century castrato singers with their inability to inseminate exerted a tremendous sexual draw on female (and male) audiences. While the inability to inseminate probably does not fascinate in the same way it did before the advent of birth control, and while Scott very openly talks about the issue of his infertility, there is curiosity and a mystique around his sexual abilities.

¹⁴⁷ www.artistsonly.com/scothm.htm. Accessed August 1, 2007.

Bruce Springsteen recorded Scott's voice as the cry when the main character, a homosexual lawyer fired for having developed AIDS, breaks down in the movie *Philadelphia* (1993). Here Scott's voice is cast to express the inexpressible: loss, sadness, vulnerability, and ultimately death. In the last episode of David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks*, Scott is again cast as death. There he dances a lonely dance against a red curtain backdrop while he sings Lynch's composition "Under the Sycamore Tree." These performative (literal, imagined and reified) castings of Scott by listeners and by a director point towards a vision of the sound of Scott's voice connected to a place beyond this world, somehow beyond where gendered and human—mortal in living form—flesh can reach. Does the cover of *Falling in Love is Wonderful* (Figure 15) express a similar sentiment?

Perhaps Jimmy Scott is not cast as the movie-star-look-alike man sitting on the floor. And perhaps Jimmy Scott is not cast as the man for whom the woman in the picture (literally) fell: She lies on the floor, arms stretched out and above her head in a position that suggests surrender. The two glasses of wine are half full, and the woman's gold slippers lie nonchalantly next to the Ray Charles LPs scattered across the floor. The fire is roaring warmly behind the two people and probably accompanies the sound of their voices in romantic chatter. The producer stated that he wanted this to be a record "guys could put on when they were with a girl—one they could make out to (Ritz 128)." Is the picture of the man not the replacement picture of Jimmy Scott, but a picture of what men could allow themselves to do in the *presence* of Jimmy Scott? Is Jimmy Scott's voice thought so genderless, and therefore unchallenging to another man that he is non-intimidating company in such situations? Does Jimmy Scott's voice offer intimacy and

intrigue due to the difficulty of locating it in terms of gender? Is Jimmy Scott considered neutered, and therefore inoffensive and non-threatening company in intimate moments? Is Scott cast both Sex and Death in this album? We have now seen a number of audience drag performance, but if we listen closely to Scott's voice? What stories might surface if we let them?

Performative Listening

When I listen to Scott's voice, previously heard voices arise in a curiously poignant way. Through Scott's voice I am confronted with the ways I have learned to name voices and vocal timbres. When I try to describe Scott's voice I find myself resorting to language that inevitably views him in relation to one of the essentialized categories I have internalized. I observe myself wanting to write: "Scott's voice doesn't sound quite like a woman's," or "Scott's voice is smoother and has more warmth than that of a man's." When I attempt to describe his voice, I bump up against the gendered binary, or I try to create a link between several known categories that could better communicate his vocal sound. Scott's performance forces me to face my own unerasable texts, that choir of voices we hear behind every voice. Instead of Scott, with his "unusual voice" and ambiguous gender identity, being left as a "hero for the margin," "a cult figure only (Hooper, online *New York Times Magazine*, 2000)," I suggest that Scott's performance offers a radical resistance which cannot be consumed within the current paradigm. First, Scott's voice so poignantly shows us that existing language cannot

capture his voice. And in that confrontation, I experience Derrida's theory of *sous rature* in practice. Instead of hearing Scott's voice and forming a new description of that, I hear his voice through and through towards the traces of the not quite erased voices from the past. And, I hear how his voice lacks if I compare it to for example an essential female or male voice. I hear how his voice has an abundance of qualities no words would embrace. The lack I hear, and the abundance I am left with, is my own lack and Scott's abundance.

In his disidentification with a socially-imposed role as a liminal performer, Scott challenges the audience. In the odd stagings with Madonna, or in Lynch's work, where Scott performs himself as the cult figure Jimmy Scott, and as Jimmy Scott, the jazz singer from Cleveland, liminality and drag are expressed through the settings within which he is positioned. Muñoz cites Felix Guattari's discussion of the power of political drag found in the theater group Mirabelle's performance:

The Mirabelles are experimenting with a new type of militant theater, a theater separate from an explanatory language [...]. They resort to drag, song, mime, dance, etc., not as different ways of illustrating a theme, to "change the ideas" of spectators, but in order to trouble them, to stir up uncertain desire-zones that they always more or less refuse to explore. The question is no longer whether one will play feminine against masculine or the reverse, but to make bodies, all bodies, break away from the representations and restrains on the "social body" (quoted in Muñoz 1999: 85).

Scott himself does not "resort to drag," but an audience that cannot make sense of him does. "For a long time," one of his colleagues said, "the joke was that Jimmy wasn't a fag, he was a lesbian (Ritz 2000: 57)." Another colleague remembers, "People were harsh with Jimmy. You'd go to his show and hear someone yell out, 'He sounds like a

freak, he looks a freak, he *is* a freak.’ But Jimmy was a gentleman. He just stood there and took it (Ritz 70).” Scott, on the other hand, recalls: “Funny, but I saw myself as a normal guy looking for normal happiness. A home. A wife. A nice income (Ritz 70).” The setting, a “sous rature” of existing ideas of physical and vocal masculinity and femininity defined Scott’s performance as liminal and drag. Thus, it was the reading that actively produced the drag performance, not Scott. This perspective shows us that the responsibility for any reading of a voice or a timbral performance is produced, in the end, by the listener. Scott’s voice holds up a mirror to the audience.

Conclusion

By drawing a wider circle and consider more players contributing to what we may think of as his performance, we may see that the liminal identity which at first seems to be the modality Scott himself offer is in fact projected onto him. It becomes clear that the cultural work of drag performance is done by his audience who *read drag into his identity*. Thus the disidentificatory move of this performance is the *non-drag* performance by Scott—his insistence on masculine and heterosexual normativity. The “trouble” and the “uncertain desire-zones” of the audience are expressed through their framing of Scott’s performance as drag. This framing reveals that we still have a way to go before we can “break away from the representations and restraints on the social body.” In our descriptions of Scott, we describe the workings of our own selves. Scott’s quiet social

critique is, in the words of Antonio Gramsci, a “ground-level poetics of self (quoted in Muñoz 94).”

I suggest that Scott’s performance offers a radical resistance that cannot easily be consumed. Further, I suggest that the different readings and interpretations of Scott’s voice and body provided by audiences and producers alike are attempts at locating his vocal body—not just any vocal body, but a vocal body that would make sense to them. Difficulties in coming to terms with Scott’s continuing performance of idiosyncratic black masculinity push audience and producers alike to interpret his performance as drag. Scott’s act of disidentification, to use Muñoz’s term, is constituted by a refusal to play into known forms of effeminate masculinity. Vocally, Scott never flaunts his high register as singers such as Little Richard, Prince, or Michael Jackson. There is no acrobatic display of the upper stratospheres of the male voice, rather, he insists on the importance of the lyrics and his relation to the beat. Still, Scott is not immune to audiences’ and producers’ images of him: listeners’ interpretations of him feed into his own. He recognized that for instance the cameo appearance in Madonna’s *Secret* video have had a substantial impact on his career. This video, where he does not sing but sits between two models in the New York City Lenox Lounge, emphasizes the “weirdness factor” assigned to him.

I suggest that record companies found it easier to *assign* bodies to Scott rather than to deal with *his body*. And I suggest that in an attempt to grasp Scott’s vocal body, his listeners’ solution has been to dispose of it and replace it with an accepted, familiar social category avatar. Instead of listening to his voice and trying to make sense of it, there is a rush forward to prefabricated answers.

Thus, in this chapter I have discussed the various ways in which audiences and producers have made sense of Scott. Looking through the prism of vignettes from Scott's career, I have located the degree to which listeners' perception of Scott contribute to the definition of his voice. This prism's light beams break open the "meaning-bundle" of vocal body, melody, words, rhythm, race, gender and sex. We see that "meaning-bundles" in reality are formed by both the performer and the listener. This investigation also shows that both the performers' and listeners' contributions are very much defined by language categories. I contend that because there are no satisfactory language categories to apply to Scott, and because we are conditioned to perceive through such limited conceptual social categories, we are hard pressed to make sense of and consume Scott's voice on its own terms. Perceived in accordance with language categories and social categories, the incomprehension and instability of non-categorizable voices such as Scotts leaves the audience at loss as how to consume such voices. In response, audiences often resort to tactics of framing such voices and performances as limited modalities. This study exemplifies the active role of the listener in her own process of consuming vocal performance: In the experience of a vocal performance, the listener's own input is as crucial as is the performer's contribution. This conclusion leads us to the following inquiry, an inquiry I will pursue in the following chapter: which components contribute to our understanding of the meaning of vocal timbre, and what are some responsible and realistic ways to analyze voice? And finally, how can we as listeners perform listening as resistance? It is this question I will examine in the following and concluding chapter.

Chapter 8

Towards a Theoretical Framework for Analyzing Vocal Timbre

There is a close correlation between body movements observable with the naked eye and hidden body movements. Examples of normally invisible body movements can be found in laryngeal cartilages, most of which are involved in the regulation of voice pitch. If it is true that a particular pattern of expressive body movements is typical of a specific emotional mode, then we would expect a corresponding pattern of, for example, voice pitch in speech produced in the same emotional mode. In other words, it is likely that expressive body movements are translated into acoustic terms of voice production.

Sundberg¹⁴⁸

It is through my body that I understand other people; just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things.' The meaning of gesture thus 'understood' is not behind it, is intermingled with the structure of the world, outlined by the gesture, and which I take up on my own account. It is arrayed all over the gesture itself.

Merleau-Ponty¹⁴⁹

Movement is the most elementary experience of human life.

Martin¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Sundberg (1987: 154-5).

¹⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty (1962: 186).

¹⁵⁰ John Martin 1965: 13).

Introduction

Five years ago I set out to write about Billie Holiday's vocal timbre. I hoped to be able to discuss the power of that voice without evoking tropes from Holiday's heavily mythologized biography. The initial quest to write about vocal timbre in terms of its sound left me searching for tools. I considered invoking spectral analysis in order to avoid producing a biographically biased explanation; in search of a deeper understanding of the context in which Holiday's voice was formed, I considered comparing historical analysis to the lyrics she sang. However, available tools seemed incomplete for a comprehensive reading of Holiday as a timbral virtuoso and communicator, as opposed to the prevailing perception of Holiday as a battered artist who was capable of and concerned with nothing more than communicating heartache.¹⁵¹

Even a work such as Angela Davis' *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, which teases out the historical feminist consciousness evidenced in the repertoire chosen and compositions written by these singers, ultimately falls short of in theory of precisely identifying how those vocal timbres express a level of meaning above and beyond the quantitative message of the lyrics. The scope of perspective offered in Farah Jasmine Griffin's self-reflexive study of Holiday, *If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (2001), by considering her own coming into being as an American woman to the soundtrack of Holiday's voice, additionally complicates her listening and analysis. Though it does not

¹⁵¹ Holiday's own ghost written biography, *Lady Sings the Blues* (Duffy 1956), exemplifies this trend. It is speculated that Holiday's participation in the publishing of an autobiography was motivated by monetary needs.

sufficiently explain the following claim, Griffin does direct us to a deeper search for universal meaning by pointing out the fact that Holiday's "voice seems to be in touch with our deepest emotions (Griffin 27)." Similarly, in "The Grain of the Voice (1977: 179-189)" —perhaps the first attempt to discuss the timbral properties of voice as a distinguishable communication vehicle with a meaning standing apart from linguistic and musical rhetoric—Roland Barthes chooses an obscure Russian bass whose recordings are impossible to locate to put forth his argument regarding the presence and communicative capacity of the sound quality of "grain." This audible vibration provides a study path to elucidate timbre, the quality of the voice that touches us. Barthes borrows from Kristeva in characterizing this zone of auditory perception creatively as "the space where significations germinate," or geno-song. The geno-song is to be found in verbal descriptions of what the listener might feel when committing to that voice. The substance and nature of the commitment is totally subjective, and a product of the reader's imagination.

I felt over extended by my initial attempts to analyze the quality of Billie Holiday's voice as I reached for analytical methods and stretched for vocabulary, finally grappling only with the void I found. This dissertation is therefore an attempt to establish a theoretical and analytical framework through which to access voices on the basis of their timbral impact, which takes into account and successfully integrates the mediation elements of pre-existing social conditions. We have seen that readings of timbre, and construction of meaning through it, are assembled from many sources, including but not limited to the sonic. The goal of discourse here is to generate and stay within a contextual framework that will respect and preserve the artist's creative agency of expression, while

recognizing that timbral meaning is significantly influenced by factors outside her control.

My analysis of Jimmy Scott's career indicates that the focus of a theoretical and analytical framework for timbre must shift to the listener. John Cage recognized this:

Most people mistakenly think that when they hear a piece of music that they're not doing anything but that something's being done to them. Now this is not true and we must arrange our music, we must arrange our art, everything, I believe, so that people realize that they themselves are doing it and not that something is being done to them (Nyman 1974: 21).

So, if the listeners "themselves are doing it" we need to investigate what they are doing, and by which means they are doing it. In this regard, Tia DeNora's work (2000, 2003) has become an important barometric point from which to gauge the temerity of a sophisticated ethnographically grounded theoretical analysis of the "powers" of music and the question of "*how* music works (2000: x, italics original)." Music, for DeNora, is, quoting sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983), a "device" for engaging in "emotional work" (2003: 96). This emotional work, according to DeNora, consists in "articulations between musical works, styles, and materials on the one hand, and desired modes of agency on the other." Music is thus used to "presage, inspire, elaborate and remind [actors] of those modes of agency and their associated emotional forms"—in other words, music is here conceived (in an Adornian sense) as a "device with which actors work themselves up and into particular subjective states and orientations (96)."

But what about the *sounds* in music affords the listener, to use DeNora's own words, the "internal impact (and potential impact) on the body (2003: 100)?" In *Music in Everyday Life* DeNora uses the imagery of music conceived as "prosthetic technology" for the body (103). With this term DeNora, drawing on Ehn (1988: 449) and

Weizenbaum (1976), theorizes music as an extension of what the body can do. As, for example, “steam shovels, stilts, microscopes or amplification systems enhance and transform the capacities of arms, legs, eyes and voices,” actors’ bodies “are enabled and empowered, their capacities empowered,” DeNora writes. “With such technologies,” she continues, “actors can do things that cannot be done independently; they are capacitated in and through their ability to appropriate what such technologies can afford (103).” But what exactly about music makes it a “prosthetic technology?” Or, asked differently, by deeming music a “prosthetic technology” does “prosthetic” articulate music as not part of the body merely connected to it? And, does “prosthetic” imply that as cultural processes are invoked, music is nothing more than an appendage to this operation?

John Shepherd, in a review of DeNora’s *Music in Everyday Life*, notes that DeNora fails to articulate that the “material through which music is recognized as music is sound, and a particular, non-denotative use of that (Shepherd 2002: 13),” which affords music its capacity as a “prosthetic technology” and with that implied that it is merely connected to but not of the body. In the same review Shepherd writes: “Sound offers up potential for communication and expression, one of which is actualized in conjunction with other material resources to bring into being the cultural artifact that we recognize as ‘music’ (13).” As we saw in chapter 4, Shepherd and Wicke addressed precisely this issue through their theoretical tool, the “technology of articulation,” that enabled the development of a performative semiological model.

This model provided me with a foundation from which to investigate meaning and affect through sounds in music. Examining changes in perception of timbre and theories of performativity enabled me to expand Shepherd and Wicke’s model in order to ascribe

meaning and affect specifically through vocal timbre. However, even though Shepherd and Wicke draw on studies of the voice to theorize a point of connection between sounds and bodies, and they establish theoretically that sound is engaged internally within the body in the way that it creates music through a technology of articulation, they only suggest very briefly that it happens and do not go further in terms of specifying how it actually happens.

Based on my theoretical and ethnographic research, as well as my embodied research as a vocal performer, voice teacher and audience member, I will argue that meaning and affect through vocal timbre must be distilled in listening and considered on its own merits in order to achieve a more complete and ultimately accurate perspective on the true measure of the creative expression of the artist thereof. I will also argue that the emotional impact of our auditory experience of musical instruments is highly defined and determined by our initial impression of the singing voice. In order to formulate a vocal timbral semiology, I develop Shepherd and Wicke's connection between the structural logic of the inner texture of life and the medium of sound.

The "Logic, Structure and Inner Texture of Life" and Its Relation to Vocal Timbre

The "logic, structure and inner texture of life" play major roles in Shepherd and Wicke's paradigm, outlining how "syntax in music can evoke internal affective states (165)." According to Shepherd and Wicke (164), states of awareness are invoked when

sonic material is recognized by an individual to be musically significant.¹⁵² The emotional quality and intensity of the state of awareness is evoked and directly affected by the characteristics of the sounds and the personal impact of those sound characteristics on the listener. The sonic material that is recognized as music, Shepherd and Wicke continue, “cannot help but evoke states of awareness whose degree and manner of affectivity [...] are related to the characteristics of the sounds presented,” and “cannot but reaffirm the present existence of the individual, and reaffirm it with a concreteness and directness not required for reaffirmation through the sounds of language.” Further, the material character of the sound in question “speaks directly and concretely through its technology of articulation to the individual’s awareness and sense of self.” Shepherd and Wicke conclude that “extension, dimension, structure and context are in this way revealed and articulated within the individual (164).” In effect, research ascribes a tangible concreteness to musical sounds whose qualities are quantifiable and measurable in humans, and have the capacity to offer up the extraordinary opportunity for humans of a quite different kind of communication. Shepherd and Wicke contend that timbre “connects directly and immediately to the affective core of the individual (167).” But what is the basis from which sound as a medium invokes that material binding of the sonic-auditory sensory plane with subjective elements of personal signification? An alternative way of phrasing this question might be: how does sound as a material medium act on the corporeal material that is the body?

Shepherd and Wicke’s theoretical model therefore ends before it enters the

¹⁵² And, what is recognized as musically valuable, or as music at all, is of course different from person to person and between different musical cultures, as the next quote suggests. Music is not a universal language; instead it is constituted from the ability of people from all cultures to distinguish between “musical sounds” and “only words” (not sung) or other sonic definitions.

territory that would support such claims; further, the elusiveness of the broad and poetic nature (e.g. “oceaness”) of their arguments renders any points of disagreement occasioned by further exploration difficult to identify; finally, the impact on sound perception of specifically stratified characteristics such as “gender” are not sufficiently explained. This is due to the fact that Shepherd and Wicke’s theoretical model does not include definitions of key terms and concepts regarding the *multi-dimensionality* of the singing voice and, as an extension, sound.

Although their theoretical model offers an indeterminate amount of intuitive understanding, it ends before it pinpoints exactly what is meant by “logic, structure and inner texture of life.” I believe that in this space that is not covered by their theoretical model lies an under-defined and still elusive territory that points towards the need for identification, clarification, quantification, and further articulation of the so-called materiality of sound’s impact on the physical body.¹⁵³

Music’s materiality is defined by DeNora “both as an aural medium and in relation to the materiality of its hearers (DeNora 2003: 99).” That is, the *materiality* of music is neither one nor the other, but the combination of aural as perceived in the ears and brain *and* the means by which the entire body perceives sound “in relation to materiality of hearers.” To her credit, DeNora further demonstrates how the sounds of music might physically involve the body. She depicts the way in which the sheer ‘force’ of a loud sound impacts the body, and how our bodies manifest the physical act of the creation of the sound. For example, if we hear a vocal sound at the uppermost limits of

¹⁵³ However, I believe that Shepherd attempted this in his “Music and Male Hegemony.” That was, in my view, an analysis of sounds and their effects within a particular cultural and psychological context. But is it necessary to look to something “prior” to that, to ask just what allows sound and body to “stick” together?

someone's voice, we might feel a constriction in our own vocal apparatus (2003: 100).¹⁵⁴

DeNora distinguishes further by citing examples of the different ways by which music mobilizes the corporeal in creation (playing an instrument) or reaction (dance) (2003: 101). According to DeNora, we might 'recognize' emotional and embodied processes in music through convention, temporality, expectancy, non-representativeness, or bits and pieces. DeNora effectively illustrates "music's symbolic meaning" (103) as examples where "music-historical notions of style, gender, and other category laden concepts come to the fore (103)." In this definition, temporality describes a situation in which the ways music moves in time, such as acceleration and crescendo, can move the listener to a corresponding sensory-emotive "climax." Expectancy describes the manner in which inhibited listeners can be moved to emotion (Leonard Meyer's theory).¹⁵⁵ Non-representativeness captures the ability of music to "elude representation," but still "provide a structure of feeling (104)." And finally, bits and pieces refer to the ways in which small pieces of sounds in music (what Philip Tagg calls *musemes*; DeNora uses a cha-cha rhythm as an example) can be emotional triggers.

DeNora also conscientiously points out that Richard Leppert (1993) has shown that the body is not the only source for corporeal reaction. Leppert argues that the 'sight of sound' influences the ways in which we corporeally react to music. For example, if we have seen a given singer appear completely effortless in the execution of a high pitch, the image of effortlessness and ease will subsequently be associated upon further auditory

¹⁵⁴ The idea of sympathetic response has a number of theoretical and political implications which I discuss only indirectly.

¹⁵⁵ This view has been disputed (Cook and Dibben 2001: 58-9) because it favors unpredictability over predictability, which addresses only "undifferentiated feelings but not specific feelings, such as joy versus grief (DeNora 2000: 104)."

perceptions of that singer's voice. In other words, when we listen to a recording of music, the already established sight-sound sensory pairing is mobilized.

In addition, discursive practices influence the ways in which we experience music. DeNora asserts that “[o]ne might ‘recognize’ in music parallels to emotional and embodied processes (2003:103).” However, despite examples and accompanying ethnographic material carefully observing moments when music seems to afford deep “emotional and embodied processes,” the question of what enables this connection remains unanswered.

I suggest that the corporeal experience of the sound of music can be traced to a deeper movement than the one symbolized by the physical action of playing an instrument, entrapment in a beat section, or recognition of music-historical notion. Those familiar with the physicality involved in the playing of a particular instrument are afforded a stronger and more immediate corporeal reaction to the sound of that instrument (Brown 1996: 27). Even a person who is familiar by sight and sound with the way an instrument is played most likely will have a different corporeal response to a particular sound than will someone who has never seen the instrument being played to make that sound in question. What then, allows the listening individual who is not making the music to have corporeal reactions to and resonances with the sounds of music?

With Richard Middleton (1990: 262), Shepherd and Wicke reason that the human voice is the instrument that most profoundly renders internal corporeal configurations perceptible for the world. Drawing on Middleton, they propose that “[v]ocalizing is the most intimate, flexible and complex mode of articulation of the body (quoted on page

179).” They argue that because the voice provides a multidimensional articulation of the body, it is therefore a technology fundamental to the foundation of the creation of human society (Shepherd and Wicke 179).

They draw on the work of the well-known Swedish voice researcher Johan Sundberg, who suggests that emotional states are reflected in corporeal states, and that corporeal states therefore shape vocal sounds. In Sundberg’s paradigm vocal sounds are expressions of emotional states:

...if it is true that a particular pattern of expressive body movements is typical of a specific emotional mode, then we would expect a corresponding pattern of, for example, voice pitch in speech produced in the same emotional mode. In other words, it is likely that expressive body movements are translated into acoustic terms of voice production (Sundberg, 1987: 154-5).

Simon Frith puts it like this: “In responding to a song, to a sound...we are drawn...into affective and emotional alliances (1996: 173).” While I fully concur with the position that emotions are articulated as corporeal states, I believe a deeper and more complete connection between vocal sounds and a vocal body is to be found in the interaction between vocal sound and the body of the listener. Still, we have not located the “rhythm, textures and structures of the body (178).” If, as Sundberg writes, “expressive body movements are translated into acoustic terms of voice production,” can corporeal knowledge between singers and listeners within the same cultural-emotional framework, when recognized, be meaningfully be shared and exchanged?

Even pre-or supra-cultural vocalization involves the vocal apparatus, as it is instrumental in some primary physical functions. When, for example, lifting a heavy object, the vocal folds must close in order to create the appropriate internal pressure (a

‘hold’), engendering the strength necessary to lift the object. Weightlifters term the technique of lifting while closing the vocal chords, and thus holding the air inside, the *valsalum maneuver*.¹⁵⁶

Imagine yourself lifting a heavy object on an exhalation (letting air go out). You would collapse! The same function is useful in producing a bowel movement (this can be observed uninhibited in infants and young children). The involvement of the vocal apparatus and the internal pressure provided by the closure of the vocal folds results in vocal sounds, more commonly described as grunts or groans. These grunts and groans are by-products of a physical action; they do not express a desire to produce a particular sound. Orgasm is another physical function in which the vocal apparatus is instrumental in the execution of the act. At the center of the physical premise of achieving orgasm lies not only the sexual organs but also, very importantly, the vocal organ. To assist the sexual organs and the entire body in sustaining the heightened internal tension which builds to orgasm, the vocal folds must close, holding in air. The air held back by the closed vocal folds allows a build-up of internal tension very similar to that which takes place during a bowel movement, but in this case yields a different form of release.¹⁵⁷

The physical act of achieving orgasm effectively illustrates how corporeal functions directly illicit and modulate levels of physical tension that result in disparate and specific vocal sounds. Although the sounds associated with the sexual act or with heavy lifting can be suppressed, or “faked”—consciously and forcibly *vocalized* instead

¹⁵⁶ Divers also use the term *valsalum maneuver*, but for them it describes a slightly modified function: closing the lips and nose, which disallows air to escape at these points.

¹⁵⁷ I choose these two examples, because they are both bodily functions for the sake of the bodily functions, not for the sake of the vocal sound in which it results. In contrast, singing is an example of a bodily activity for the sake of sound.

of arising out of the mechanical physical need for the closure of the vocal folds—these kinds of sounds evince a common function of the human vocal apparatus which precedes cultural context.¹⁵⁸ When we hear vocal sounds arising out of, and being part of, a specific context, those sounds we perceive are testament to a common function of all bodies, and thus testament to a connection between all bodies. This lies not in the recognition of the sonic, but in a common association of the sonic with specific physical events on the part of the perceivers which represents a recognition, or common language, of *corporeal function*.

The origin of associations between specific vocal sounds and the physical states that produce them lies within the corporeal function. That is to say that if I hear the sound of an orgasm, I can through cognitive association with that sound physically feel some level of the approximate physical tension in my body produced from similar personal experience and familiarity with the event from which that vocal sound is produced. By extrapolation, we infer that the physical act of singing is similar to the physical act of lifting, performing a bowel movement or achieving orgasm. As physical actions are dependent on a general level of tension in the vocal folds generated by specific events such as the aforementioned, then we can also say that emotions inspired in us when stimulated according to specific vocal sounds are characteristic of a particular vocal style.

At this point in the discussion I will argue that the rhythm, textures and structures of the body resonating with vocal timbre—on the deepest level—are not a *response* to “expressive body movements translated into acoustic terms of voice production.” Further,

¹⁵⁸ Insert reference to the article about the sound of orgasm used in popular music.

it is not through bodily functions such as heartbeat, bloodstream etc.¹⁵⁹ that our “logic, structure and inner texture of life” come into being. Rather, I suggest that the primary level on which we respond to and recognize the inner textures of human vocal timbres and the emotions expressed through those timbres takes place through that initial *corporeal recognition*.¹⁶⁰

In effect, Shepherd and Wicke’s notion of the “logic, structures and textures of inner life” is not an “expressive” or emotional connection, but rather is *materialized* through corporeal mechanical memory. I seek to discern and differentiate levels of perception from what is perceived in its natural state by the beholder as a monofocal, or single perception. Recognition, recollection and ‘resonance’ with vocal sounds are all individual subjective *translations* of the vocal sounds in music, the production of which is also based on various and specific levels of tension and release. Cognition, such as hearing, may be translated back to the basic level of the recognition of tensions and releases generated in the execution of corporeal mechanical functions.

Because the sound of the voice is generated within a bodily organ that plays a central role in one primal function of the body, and because the sound of the voice sometimes emanates from that primal act of orgasm, knowledge about the tension or energy of the body creating that vocal sound represents a corporeal experience triggered by aural input. By the same line of reasoning, *knowledge about the timbre of the singing*

¹⁵⁹ Many theorists since (and including) Plato have proposed that, for example, the temperature of a human’s body, the rhythm of the heart beat, etc. provide the primary connection between bodies and music.

¹⁶⁰ Smith Alexander Reed has made a similar argument (2005). Exploring the semiotics of vocal timbre (through analysis of Laurie Anderson and Louis Armstrong), Reed also concludes that “because of our familiarity with the articulations of human sound, as we hear a voice we are able to imagine and mimic the choreography of the vocal tract, engaging a physical and bodily listening, thereby making not only the performance but also listening a self-affirming bodily reflection of being (2005:iv).”

voice is informed by *knowledge of other corporeal functions*,¹⁶¹ leading to my conclusion that a deep experience of the timbre of instruments, such as intense emotion, is a manifestation of the corporeal experience stimulated by, and as an extension of, the sound of the singing voice.

The common ground between the bodies of listeners and the vocal body as it is heard is to be found in the dynamic of interaction identified and inherent to corporeal mechanical recognition. The corporeal tensions and releases are points of recognition activated prior to the point where those tensions and releases are accounted for within sociopolitical and historical processes such as written word or verbal identification. The common ground between people singing and people listening to the sounds of the voice lies not in the commonality of sound being perceived externally, but rather in the commonality of the associative process of recognition of the *corporeal*. In other words, the continuing, unfolding binding of the listener to the vocal timbre is enabled by recognition of, and binding with, the corporeal associations the vocal sound carries. Keep in mind, the corporeal associations necessarily vary from person to person. However, the very fact that we as humans understand at some level that we are all perceiving the sounds of music and voice not only objectively (i.e. the sound of the music), but subjectively through the capacity we each have for attaching particular personal associations to the sound (i.e. music) we all hear at a given moment, is the quantifiable indicator of the commonality of corporeal experience for humanity. Timbre exists not only as aurality, but also as corporeality. As a consequence I propose the terms “timbre

¹⁶¹ And because this connection between bodies is tied to primary functions such as listening, this vocal apparatus-corporeal connection is prior even to the desire of creating vocal sounds or listening to vocal sounds.

sonic” and “timbre corporeal”¹⁶² to distinguish between the way in which timbre has historically been considered and analyzed and the approach I undertake. Vocal timbre must be recognized *not only as aural but also as corporeal*. From this I will suggest that the connection between *the logics, structure and textures of inner life* and *timbre* is to be found in the *timbre corporeal*.

I have so far located the logic, structure and textures of inner life in timbre corporeal. I have denied that any meaning per se is inherent in timbre corporeal but rather that at the moment of material binding of timbre, the nature, quality, and extent of the construction of meaning through that sound is a product of corporeal activity. Although I have described a trajectory by which corporeal recognition of sound leads to the construction of meaning, both a circular and a nonlinear repositioning are enabled through this bond. I choose to characterize this repositioning as a shuffling of connections between denotative and connotative signification, a process which bears further exposition at this juncture.

Theorizing Affect and Meaning Constructed Through Vocal Timbre: Articulation Through Performance

Recalling Shepherd and Wicke’s model of syntax and meaning in music, we remember the connection between tertiary ‘denotative’ signification and secondary connotative, signification. If, for instance, a person hears a sound from external reality, he

¹⁶² Listening for and to timbre corporeal is the kind of resistant listening sought out in chapter 7.

might make a connection to an internal, affective state—the *memory* of the feeling—of the concept “oceaness.” Or, if we imagine a concept such as militariness, perhaps the concrete sounds of drums come to mind. In Part One of this dissertation, we encountered the concept of African-American vocal timbre, and gained a clear idea of what the listener imagines it to sound like. As the existence of a particular timbral color caused by race is not something that exists in the real, material world, vocal bodies have had to produce timbres that match and are subsequently associated with this concept. Whether the idea of racialized timbre is derived from the sound of a particular genre of music (for example, spirituals), a geography-based dialect, or any other concrete or constructed source, the idea of timbre evidencing race is a sound that is being called upon in order to fulfill specific expectations qualifying a distinct corporeal *African-Americanness*.

To actively fulfill such timbral expectations, the body must be mobilized. The vocal body assumes in the mind of the beholder a perceptive shape or form that fulfills associations of and adheres to specific *conventions* of race and ethnicity through vocal timbre. And, through repetition, the vocal body takes, fills, and develops that perceptually relevant shape until it assumes that shape on a permanent basis in the mind, memory and finally emotion of the listener. This process of ordering upon identification voiced sounds within a network of cultural expectations represents a *discursive practice with corporeal consequences*. I will now turn to the question of the point of contact between the discursive and the corporeal.

Joined and disjoined, the contact between the discursive and the corporeal is flexible and can be both re-joined and re-combined. Stuart Hall, in an interview with Larry Grossberg (1996), said: “we also speak of an articulated lorry (truck): a lorry where

the front (cab) and the back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken (Grossberg and Hall 141).” In my attempt to understand the vocal bodies presented in the case studies, Hall’s term and theoretical concept have proven useful. Introducing the concept of articulation provides a point of connection between the discursive and the corporeal, as well as the point of departure for discussion. For Hall, articulation is the point of connection between two independent parts, a connection that can be broken and established, carrying its own distinctive implications. It speaks to a point of connection with impact—an articulatory connection.

Although the concept of articulation can be traced back to Marxist and post-Marxist theory, the term gained renewed interest in the area of cultural studies through Stuart Hall’s seminal essay “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance (1980).” Hall used articulation to describe “a complex structure...in which things are related, as much through their difference as through their similarities (Hall 325).” Articulation is however not only the “complex structure” but also the mechanism which creates the unity of the structure. Therefore, articulation is always context dependent. But, although articulation is conditional and context dependent, in the words of Hall, “‘no necessary correspondence’ or expressive combination can be assumed as given (325).” “Since the combination is a structure (an articulated combination), and not a random association—” he continues, “there will be structured relations between its parts, i.e., relations of dominance and subordination (325).” In a 1986 interview with Lawrence Grossberg, he describes articulation as:

...the forms of the connection that make a unity out of two different

elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? So the so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary “belongingness.” The “unity” which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected. Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects. Let me put that the other way: the theory of articulation asks how an ideology discovers its subject [and how] the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it; it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense of intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position (Grossberg and Hall 141-142).

Here we read that social structures are pre-established, and yet we also read that social relations are negotiable and in constant change and flux.

Jason Stanyek (2004) interprets Hall’s text to suggest that “social formations are both productive and reproductive, that subjects both constitute and are constituted by ideologies, that context needs to be seen as conditional yet not ephemeral, not just nothing either (18).” Stanyek notices Hall’s failure to develop the concept of articulation beyond a *hybrid product* (18), and ascribes an instrumentality to Hall’s use of *elements* (18). This instrumentality, Stanyek argues, is a tension that may also be found in the work of music scholars who draw on Hall’s articulation theory. In particular, Nicolas Meeús and Richard Middleton’s work exemplify this practice. One common component in Meeús and Middleton’s work is a concern with the joining of “elements” in music (Stanyek 18-19). Articulation figures heavily in Stanyek’s dissertation *Diasporic Improvisation and the Articulation of Intercultural Music* (2004). However, he nudges

the term away from Hall's original concept towards its anatomical root—articulation of joints—arguing that “social structures have ‘weight’ only insofar as they bear down on bodies” and proposes a theory of improvisation as an intercorporeal articulation.¹⁶³ Here we see the use of articulation to address interactions on the discursive level, and also on the corporeal level. In my case studies from (Part I) however, it is quite clear that neither the discursive nor the corporeal is neatly juxtaposed. The discursive easily spills over into the corporeal, and the corporeal consequently seems to confirm the discursive.

The uncontainable boundary between the discursive and the corporeal is, I propose, an *articulatory point*. Through viewing this interaction between the discursive and corporeal as an articulation it becomes possible to identify the features distinguishing the discursive and the corporeal from one another, yet conceptualize how they interact and affect one another. These two parts are independent yet connected, the articulatory point being the fundamental key in the realization of each part. Articulation therefore *lies at or within the point where discursive practices are carried out through the corporeal*.

Besides the articulatory point between the discursive and the corporeal, the point of interaction between levels of signification is also activated through the process of articulation. A sound from the external world (third level of signification) is heard and, through articulation, engages a concept from the internal world (second level of signification) or calls upon the logic, structures and inner textures of life (first level of signification). The concept ‘technology of articulation’ figures heavily in Shepherd and Wicke’s semiological model of timbre in music (173). It is the technology of articulation

¹⁶³ Tracy McMullen (2006: 61-80) problematized the favoring of the intercorporeal in the scholarship of performer-scholars Jason Stanyek and Vijey Iyer.

that enables the material binding between the sonic saddle and the elements of signification. As these two concepts loosely parallel signifier and signified, the model reveals that it is exactly the ‘technology of articulation’ and the consequent material binding that differentiates this process of signification from the process at work in language. Between the signifier and the signified there is no technology of articulation, and thereby no fixity in meaning. However, in Shepherd and Wicke’s model, technology of articulation simply refers to an *active* process, as does ‘performative’ (169). Both ‘technology of articulation’ and ‘performative’ are used in Shepherd and Wicke’s model to describe a process in which the listener is actively engaged, and thereby participates in the process, from development to activation, of meaning formation.

Articulation and the performative are closely related and interdependent in my model. Thus the term ‘articulation’ emphasizes that two things are joined together “through a specific linkage, that *can be broken*” (my emphasis) (Grossberg and Hall 141). Because the linkage can be broken new connections may be brought to life. The listener reinforces a link, breaks it or creates new articulations between new parts through performative listening. When connecting words, images, movement or sound in the external world with the concepts that logic, structures and textures of inner life conjure in the internal world, these connections are made inside the larger social framework within which listeners function. In the words of DeNora,

“To speak of framing a musical work and its impact upon that work’s perception is to speak of how listening is mediated through one or another cultural schema; how it inevitably takes place from within one confine of particular and selective universes of works, and is often linked to status group affiliation (DeNora 2003: 28).”

Mediated listening takes place within the process we are discussing: the

associations made between the first, second and third levels of signification take place within “selective universes of works” and listening practices. The contestation of the connections between these levels takes place, I will argue, through performance. Here I use the term (as developed in chapter 4) to mean a set of behaviors which deliver a unified image of an identity. A particular set of behaviors that makes sense within the social, economical and historical context in which it was performed is called upon by any of the actors engaged in the music making and music reception process. This performative tactic activates or deactivates the articulation between two independent parts. In short, the performative creates a link between two independent parts, and articulation activates the link between those two parts. This tactic also speaks to the re-performance and re-activation of a previously established link. I term this *articulation through performance*.

Articulation through performance is an active definition or re-definition of the articulatory joints. It is also the point at which the discursive impresses upon the corporeal. Not only is articulation through performance a joining, corroboration or intensification of the discursive in material form, it may also engender a disconnection between the discursive and vocal timbre in the external world. Thus articulation through performance may both join and disengage articulation between a concept and a material form. In this ability lies the performance of both the singer and the audience.

In singing, the aural is a result of immediate corporeal activation. I have therefore located structural characteristics in processes of meaning construction in the corporeal, rather than merely in the aural. When we enjoy singing, we experience vocal timbre ultimately through frequency and amplitude, but first through muscle recognition. This

argument does not only apply to situations in which we as listeners share the physical space with the singer. I suggest that this process also takes place while listening to the voice of a singer we don't see. In that situation, the sound perceived not only invites hearing, but also touch—the visceral experience of the tension and release that produced the sound. As we can feel the tension in a friend's stressed body in our own bodies, and as we can feel the jitteriness in a colleague's impatient body, we can sense the muscular energy in the body of a singer. I have further argued that our experience of instrumental music takes place through a translation of the experience of corporeal activation to vocal timbre. Thus the binding between the logic, structures and texture of inner life and the listener is enabled through a corporeal recognition and mirroring first (timbre corporeal) and sound second (timbre sonic).

For example, in the case of Jimmy Scott audiences did not know what concept would best correspond to the physical sound of his voice. Thus they performed readings of the sound of his voice that invoked specific attachment-based conceptualizations of him—female, child, androgynous—which in turn would evoke other images from the external world. The image of a female on the cover of *The Source* is one illustration of that activation. This example may be read as a listener's attempt to make sense of Scott's voice by performing a listening (as this concept was developed in chapter 7) that defines Scott as a female (second level of signification). After this performance has taken place, the LP cover becomes an example of the image called upon by that concept of femininity, and subsequent listeners hear Scott's voice paired with the picture on the album cover. For them, the articulation between the sound of Scott's voice and the body that created that vocal sound has been made. Now it is up to each individual listener to re-articulate

that performed listening through consumption (instead of renegotiation) of that pair—to articulate that image-sound-concept compound.

Scott's voice, and the concepts we have seen people perform in relation to it, activates not only images but also words. In attempting to describe his voice listeners invoked known concepts of gender, and re-articulated those concepts by either identifying him with drag: "he has the voice of a woman," or "he sounds like a child;" or dis-identifying him: "he doesn't sound like a man." We also observed rejection when these performances were prevented from successfully taking place. Because of Scott's unconventional voice, record executives had difficulty knowing how to define him for an audience and thereby make money from his work.

Perhaps the most successful articulation of Scott's gender and age ambiguity was David Lynch's casting of Scott as Death in the last episode of *Twin Peaks*, with both feet beyond this world. With the positioning of the second level signification of concept beyond gender and age, multiple sounds from the external world could be called upon. And with that image in place, modes of hearing Scott's voice were freer than when one tried to make sense of the timbre of his voice through the lens of gender. Jimmy Scott's insistence on his own idiosyncrasy asserts a cognitive unhooking and a re-hooking. Audiences, however, undo this again by performing drag *for* him from the images and the language they use to describe him. This process illustrates the ongoing cycle of articulation (activation) and re-articulation (re-activation) through performance.

My discussion of articulation through performance first focused on the corporeal consequences of the discursive. In the case of Jimmy Scott, I observe shifts in the way that audience understanding and articulation of Scott's voice has affected his vocal body

by shaping his performance choices. If anything, it is ultimately Scott's repertoire that has been most influenced. The types of artists that have been interested in associating themselves with Scott after his 'rediscovery' in the late 1980s introduced new repertoire from the distinctive set of sounds categorized as pop and rock, whereas Scott had previously sung mostly jazz. If we assume that the avatars of Scott's body did not substantively affect the ways in which he chose to sing, we may further infer those avatars did not greatly affect his vocal body. The voice students in chapter 2, however, underwent major physical changes in their efforts to faithfully conform to the concepts exemplified by their voice teachers and the larger classical vocal community.

It is exactly the necessary impossibility of matching a concept from internal affective states with real sounds that reveals a disconnect between concept and the materialization of a concept. But an inherent gravitation towards matching concepts is discernible from internal affective states, concepts that are historically and socially context-specific. First, through an ethnography of vocal pedagogy, we see the tremendous effort put forth to match a concrete sound in external reality with an inner concept of that sound. Then in the Vocaloid ethnography we perceive a sonic error resulting from the developers' taking for granted that the blackness of the body attached to the sound of "generic soul singing." Further in the study of African-American vocal timbre in slaves' voices we see that same concrete sounds can evoke different secondary/connotative significations (as we recall, the sound of noise which would mean sub-human, or the sound of sorrowful singing, which would indicate the existence of a subject).

In the Vocaloid example, in which the producers at Zero-G attempt to encapsulate race, we may identify the starting point as the concept of a "generic soul singer." When

the producers imagined how to create that sound, their association from the real world with the concept of that sound was connected to race. As we saw, the choice based on race presented unexpected results: the singer possessed a different accent than the soul genre usually would *normatively* exhibit. The notion of race (instead of geographical or social circumstances) tied to a particular vocal genre or expression thus collapses. The articulatory point came into being through the software project manager's activation of the associative connection between *generic soul singer* and *blackness*. The software project manager performed his association with the concept of 'generic soul singer' in his choice of a singer as the voice of Lola. But when users heard this voice, they did not recognize the sound to be connected to other vocal sounds that are generally labeled as the soul genre. The software project manager chose the singer for her racial features first, and her ability to project soul timbre second.

In the case of the listening to the voices of slaves at the cusp of abolition, we saw that perspectives on sounds are mediated through pre-existing and changing social conditions. Performative articulation is perceptible in listeners' activation of the belief that slaves were sub-humans *or* the belief that slaves were humans.

The vocal pedagogues' understanding of the extent to which race and ethnicity determine vocal timbre deeply affected their perception of sound, and their intuitions about how to develop their students' voices. Aspects of their students' appearance activated concepts of race and ethnicity, and consequently indicated which timbres from external reality would match those concepts. By shaping the vocal instruments to be able to project concepts of racialized timbre, performative articulations were activated by teachers and students.

The Vocal Body (ii)

From this I conclude that meaning as constructed through vocal *timbre sonic* shuffles the connections between physical timbre as it exists in the external world, and concepts in the internal world. *What is to be gained from turning to vocal timbre corporeal?* Writing about the fields of music studies, Susan McClary writes: “our music theories and notational systems do everything possible to mask those dimensions of music that are related to physical experience and focus instead on the orderly, the rational, the cerebral.” “The fact that the majority of listeners engage with music for more immediate purposes,” she continues, ‘is frowned upon by our institutions’ (1990: 14).” While we possess many tools with which to analyze music, Shepherd and Wicke lament the limitation that these tools are based on descriptions of sounds as physical events occurring *in time and space*, and *are constituted as linguistic discourses*. As a consequence, Shepherd and Wicke conclude that “as linguistic discourses, music theory and music analysis are quite different and distinct in the character of their *thinking* from the character of musical *experience*...they cannot ‘reach out’ to musical experience in any convincing or useful manner (Shepherd and Wicke 1997: 143).”

Raymond Williams proposed that “we are now beginning to see how and why... the actual experience of the arts...is more than a metaphor; it is a physical experience as real as any other (1965: 41).” How do we, in the words of DeNora, theorize how “culture works at the level of embodied action (2000: 76)?” Mark Johnson traces the origin of communication—even through language—to the denotative and the non-referential, to

the embodied level:

I am perfectly happy with talk of the conceptual/propositional content of an utterance, *but only insofar as we are aware that this propositional content is possible only by virtue of a complex web of nonpropositional schematic structures that emerge from our bodily experience*. Once meaning is understood in this broader, enriched manner, it will become evident that the structure of rationality is much richer than any set of abstract logical patterns completely independent of the patterns of our physical interactions in and with our environment (Johnson 1987: 5).

In other words, the denotational provides an underlying map through which people make sense of the referential. Our sense of the referential is thus rooted in the corporeal geography of human experience. Johnson describes us as seeking to name the contours of and connections involved in this experience. For an account of meaning and reality to be relevant, it must reveal that it is through embodied and imaginative structures that we possess our world.

A contour of singing would draw flesh before frequencies. The first *connections* are made between bodies' recognition of embodied supra-cultural utilization of the vocal apparatus. Such an equation reveals that singing is a choreographing of the body for the pleasure of sound. So, for a moment, let's not listen, but rather

pause

before I invite you to embody the conclusion.

Timbre Corporeal

I invite you to turn to look towards timbre corporeal. In the dance style developed by Martha Graham, the American pioneer of modern dancing, breathing facilitates the movement of the body. Dance is breathing. Singing is dancing.

*Dance is an absolute. It is not knowledge
about something, it is knowledge itself.*¹⁶⁴

The stage is dark. Light slowly emerges, revealing the outline of the jaw and neck of the performer. A head turned slightly to the left so the angle between the neck and the head is smaller. Sharp turn.

A firm grip. Inhale. Wait. Slow and controlled release. Elongate the spine. Inhale. One suspended movement in the air carries me over into the next. Being caught before I land— being led into an embrace. An embrace that provides balance, an embrace I can lean into. The lower part of the body supports and capacitates control of the upper part of the body. Although the lower part supports, there must be an equal balance of strength between the two. If not, there is nothing for the lower part to support—to lean into. And it will tip over by its own strength alone. Out of balance. Losing focus. But this time, the strength of the two is equally balanced. A beautiful tone is suspended in air. “*Caro nome.*” “I put my spell on you.” “1-2-3, A-B-C.”

The act of singing—through this process of considering singing, teaching voice,

¹⁶⁴ Martha Graham ([1941] 1980: 11).

and studying vocality—emerges in my horizon as a highly sophisticated and evolved choreography. Just as ballet dancers put themselves through rigorous daily rehearsals, systematically and exhaustively training each muscle fiber in their bodies so as to better manipulate their form, singers are careful to keep their bodies hydrated and to take their bodies through daily exercises that will keep their musculature and the ligaments in the head, neck, shoulders and torso regions flexible, alert, and strong so as to ensure control down to the micro-level of their voice producing organs. Singing¹⁶⁵ calls for an elaborate *passé développé*¹⁶⁶ of the diaphragm and a strong *relevé*¹⁶⁷ of the ribs. When the soft palate makes a *soubresaut*¹⁶⁸ it enables the vocal tract to *arabesque*.¹⁶⁹ The choreography of which I write is rather discreet. Its utterance is singing and its first desire is to seduce the ear.

Air fills me. By keeping my torso erect my body holds this air in suspense before I slowly allow it to pass from my lungs, through the vocal tract and over the vocal folds. The vocal folds have already reacted to the pitch in which my mind has decided to sing and are on-guard in the proper position. As the air escapes the vocal folds, it is sent through the vocal tract, the length and diameter of which “tune” the sound. The sound is again shaped into a vowel or into a consonant by the shapes of the mouth cavities, or by the position of the tongue and the contour of the lips. In order to support all this activity, my feet must be firmly planted on the floor. I must breathe “against them.” My body is

¹⁶⁵ I have not heard singing described through dance vocabulary. While the terms used to describe, say, classical ballet might not constitute the ultimate vocabulary for describing singing, I make a point of using a set of terms that, when called upon, activates the ligaments, the tendons, the muscles of a body in a three dimensional space.

¹⁶⁶ To unfold.

¹⁶⁷ Raised in (working leg closing to support).

¹⁶⁸ Sudden spring (1st jump in ballet that does not change feet).

¹⁶⁹ The longest line in ballet.

balanced and strong enough to take the huge impact of slowly letting some air (shaped by the cavities, tongue and lips) pass through. As I become increasingly accustomed to all of this, it feels as though the ground under my feet and the air surrounding my body supports me and holds me up. Like an invisible hand holding me aloft, or cushions gently pushing against me, keeping me upright. Like a strong wind I can lean into. These invisible hands also provide resistance so that it is easier to push the ribs out, hold the body extended and the spine suspended.

The air leaves the lips and fills the air. It travels until it meets something that can bounce it back. A trained ear and a trained body (any ear and body are trained to this level) can determine the size of the space they are in by the particular sound of their voice in a particular room. My sound is sent out and I learn, through vibrations, about the size of the space I occupy. If other peoples' bodies fill the space I occupy, their presence alters the sound. The room will feel, not smaller, but filled. Their bodies will absorb some of the sounds before it hits the walls. Their bodies will heat the air and alter the speed at which the sound travels.

As timbre corporeal occupies the fibers of bodies and trickles into ears, my written voice seeks out readerly eyes and ears to follow me to conclude.

* * *

Conclusion

This dissertation joins theoretical investigations involved with (1) the construction of meaning of and through sounds in music; (2) the key role played by listeners in the ongoing relationship between discourse and material reality; and (3) vocal timbre as performed by, rather than as essential to, the body.

My key contribution to the study of the voice lies in my realization that vocal analysis has hitherto been focused on what I term *timbre sonic*. This realization, coupled with an awareness that a particular timbre is performative rather than an inherent property of bodies, enabled me to trace the performance of timbre (as distinct from its sonic results) to its roots in the body – not only in the sense of vocal performativity as the performativity of a particular genre or vocal *fach*, but in both the unconscious and conscious performance of the often invisible micro-movements of the vocal apparatus: the choreographed throat, tongue, mouth, and torso. In light of these aspects, I propose that any analysis of vocal timbre must consider the corporeal aspect of forming that timbre – that is, it must be an analysis of *timbre corporeal*.

The works of John Shepherd and Peter Wicke (1997) and Tia DeNora (2000, 2003) have been especially important in the formulation and working out of these ideas. While I have relied heavily on the work of these theorists, I believe I have also advanced, and in some cases furthered it.

My theory of the ways in which we connect with and comprehend vocal timbre through the common use and experience of the vocal apparatus in everyday life amplifies – and expands with concrete, embodied research – Shepherd and Wicke’s notion that the “logic, structure and inner texture of life” is a key point in the understanding of the

meaning of sounds in music. While my work provides much-needed concrete examples which elaborate Shepherd and Wicke's formulation, it also grounds DeNora's work on the active use of music and its effects in everyday life – which, while providing excellent ethnographic examples, is in some instances not deeply theoretically grounded. My theoretical contribution forges a connection between the works of DeNora and those of Shepherd and Wicke.

This dissertation provides a robust example of the fertile use of performance theory in the study of music. At the same time, it expands the field of performance theory by situating the performance of sound in the physical and embodied sphere. As the field of performance theory arose partly from the study of the *words* in speech, I am pleased to contribute a theoretical framework for the analysis of *singing*. In a style of singing where the pronunciation of the words, pitch, rhythm and tempo all are predetermined, I focus on the performativity of timbre.

Tomie Hahn (October 25, 2007) pointed out in a recent presentation that research is often divided by the senses. Ethnomusicologists, for instance, observe through listening, dance scholars observe with their bodies from the torso downward, musicologists through reading manuscripts. In an attempt to decolonize timbre, I have examined singing with my entire body, rather than with only my ears. I have come to the conclusion that listening is not only an aural, but a *corporeal act and an experience that gives birth to sound*.

Therefore, a theoretical framework for thinking about timbre corporeal would not court the “orderly, the rational, the cerebral”; instead, it would move the body. If, in the words of John Blacking (1977: 23), “the ultimate achievement in thinking is to be moved

to think,” the ultimate reading of timbre corporeal must move the body to conscious awareness that is not exclusively, or even predominantly, cerebral. In that moment, timbre sonic and timbre corporeal are joined as one.

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